







THE CITIZEN WRITER IN RETROSPECT

Albert Maltz

Interviewed by Joel Gardner

VOLUME I

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

I suspect that most of the readers who will seek out this oral history will be, as I was when I first approached Albert Maltz, in search of a political memoir. After all, for slightly more than twenty years, Maltz stood in the midst of the most significant political struggle of this century. During the thirties and forties, there was not a cause involving human or political rights that did not capture his attention. He devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to the realization of a vision of radical democracy gleaned from his understanding of the principles of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, the Abolitionists, and the Marxists, among others. As a member of the Communist party, the League of American Writers, the Authors Guild, the Screen Writers Guild, and, reluctantly, the Hollywood Nineteen, Maltz fought for the rights of workers and against racism, anti-Semitism, thought control, and wars for profits and empire. His commitment was rewarded with a jail sentence: one year in the federal prison at Mill Point, West Virginia; he had, in 1947, finally gone too far: he had dared to challenge the right of a committee of Congress to inquire into his political beliefs and activities.

Nine other Hollywood workers went to prison in the summer of 1950, and the careers of all were marked by the

experience. In Maltz's case, he was forever identified as a man solidly rooted in the mainstream of American radical politics and marked as a man of courage and integrity and fidelity to ideals. Unfortunately, Maltz's decision to defend, loudly and clearly, the First Amendment foreshortened the public identity about which he cared most. For he was and remains, first and foremost, a writer: a gifted, prolific, impassioned, committed writer, who, in 1947, stood on the threshold of an important literary career. Moving steadily and smoothly from stage plays to short stories and then to novels (and using screen writing as a means of support), Maltz was reaching an artistic crest in his depiction of people involved in difficult or contradictory situations and faced with moral choices requiring courageous action. And although much of his work contained sharp and accurate criticisms of the country and culture that shaped him, Maltz never felt alienated from America; he termed himself a "citizen-writer," a writer with a responsibility to alter the inegalitarian and unjust practices he witnessed.

He did not consider himself a martyr to the cause of freedom. He did not wear his prison sentence as a badge of honor. And although he would write, "To be locked up is a very, very deep violation of one's living spirit," he does not consider jail the worst experience of his life. Nor did he emerge from prison an embittered man. He was too politi-

cally sophisticated, too much a student of history to be surprised by being caught in what was, finally, the latest in a series of reactionary, oppressive political waves that periodically sweep the American landscape. Maltz clearly saw the parallels between the events of 1947 and the events of the late 1790s, the period of the Alien and Sedition Acts. One of the most frequently consulted and heavily underlined books in Maltz's extensive library is Claude G. Bowers's Jefferson and Hamilton. Maltz, like the Jeffersonian newspaper editors who ran afoul of the Adams administration as a result of their criticism of its policies, had no choice: he had to resist. He knew that jail was one of the possible outcomes of that choice.

He emerged from jail with his vocation as a writer intact (one of his best novels, A Long Day in a Short Life, in fact, developed from events he witnessed in a Washington, D.C., lockup while awaiting transfer to Mill Point), but his career as a writer was seriously damaged. Publicly blacklisted from the movie studios and blacklisted de facto by the American publishing industry, Maltz continued to write but not to be read in this country. As a result, the year in jail took on a heightened image in Maltz's mind. Always meticulous and accurate about facts, causes, effects, and motives, he became even more so in the years after his release.

Those who know only that Albert Maltz was one of the

Hollywood Ten probably also know his writings only through the letters he has written to various publications over the years, notably those challenging the recollections of screen writers who lived through the blacklist era. No book on the subject of Hollywood and the blacklist would be complete without extensive quotation from the correspondence between Maltz and Dalton Trumbo elicited by Trumbo's oft-quoted phrase that during the blacklist era "there were only victims." Trumbo's desire to express magnanimity on the occasion of receiving the Writers Guild of America's Laurel Award displeased most of his former political associates; it enraged Maltz. Not mincing words, Maltz wrote: "To say that those who aided and applauded these committees, and did their bidding, were also 'victims' along with those who opposed them and thereby suffered public humiliation, slander, job blacklist and blasted careers, is factual nonsense and lacking in moral judgment."

Although he would not see it this way, it has always seemed to me that Maltz has become a keeper of the flame of truth of the blacklist era. It is not an obsession--it hardly consumes his life--but it is an obligatory aspect of his life as a citizen-writer, and it is a smaller part of the greater truth about Maltz's passion for accuracy and historical exactitude. Each of his novels is represented in his house by the long shelves of books he has read to provide him with

the historical data and social texture of the particular era that concerns him. He steeps himself in the history of his subject, seeking and reading everything that is germane.

In the course of my talks with Maltz, I always thought that he would have been a fine historian. He has a finely tuned appreciation for documentation. In this oral history, he has proven me correct, documenting for future historians and generations a meritorious life. It is a reflection of the integrity of Maltz as citizen-writer and the emergence of Maltz as author-historian, the capstone of his lifelong goal to keep the record straight.

--Larry Ceplair, 1981

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Joel Gardner, senior editor, Oral History Program. B.A., M.S., French, Tulane University; M.A., Journalism, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Maltz's Los Angeles home.

Dates: February 13, 1975; August 5, 12, 19, 26, September 3, 16, 1976; September 15, 16, 20, October 3, November 8, 15, 21, December 8, 18, 22, 1978; January 3, 9, and 26 (video), 1979.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Interviews took place mornings or afternoons, either before or after lunch. Sessions lasted about three hours apiece. Thirty-six hours of conversation were recorded.

Persons present: Maltz and Gardner.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

The interviewer embarked on the project with a thorough grounding in the history of screenwriting in the 1930s and '40s. Already familiar with the literary setting, he delved into Maltz's published works--stories, novels, and essays--and his screenplays. He also read widely in the political history of the period. Finally, he read from the transcript of Maltz's testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, summations of the committee's investigations of the motion picture industry, and about the years of black-listing that followed those investigations.

Nevertheless, the interviewer's preparation paled before that of the interviewee. Maltz made voluminous notes prior to each session. He cited a variety of sources, quoting directly onto the tape. Occasional questions interrupted the recounting of the autobiography, for, in the interviewer's perspective, the interviewee dictated his life story in the presence of an oral historian.

Maltz recorded back-up cassette tapes during each session--fortunately, as it turned out.

EDITING:

The processing of the Maltz oral history was not without its difficulties. Prior to transcription, two tapes (XVI and XVII) were misplaced. Deborah Young, assistant editor, was dispatched to conduct a replacement session October 25, 1979. Subsequently the original tapes were located. (The replacement tape and transcript are available to researchers. See SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS below). During transcription blank spots were discovered on several tapes. These were filled by means of the interviewee's cassettes (see CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW).

Editing was done by Young. She checked the verbatim transcript against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and verification of proper nouns. Words and phrases inserted by the editor for clarity have been bracketed.

Maltz reviewed and approved the edited transcript, which was then final typed. While proofreading, Rick Harmon, editor, became concerned about some apparent inconsistencies. These were submitted to the interviewee, corrected, and inserted into the text. During indexing (by Mitch Tuchman, principal editor), further queries arose, and Maltz patiently and generously dealt with those as well.

The introduction was written by Larry Ceplair, co-author of The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings and edited transcript of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the University. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program. In addition, several other items have been placed in the Archive. These include: the tapes and transcript of the Maltz/Young session, the text of the famous Waldorf statement issued by the motion picture producers at the time of the congressional contempt citations against the Hollywood Ten, copies of correspondence between Maltz and attorney Ben Margolis and between

Ring Lardner, Jr., and Margolis, an excerpt from Maltz's book The Citizen Writer, as well as a copy of that book. Maltz has donated a print of the film The Hollywood Ten. It is available for viewing in the UCLA Film Archive.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 13, 1975

GARDNER: Mr. Maltz, as we discussed beforehand, the interview begins with the chronological beginning; so if you'd like to discuss your birth and early years and perhaps something about your family. . . .

MALTZ: Yes, I will. My family, as with anyone, is very important. But an observation occurs to me with which I might begin. My first wife [Margaret] came from a long line of people who had come first to the United States around, I think, 1630, in one branch of the family, and the other in around 1650--one branch English and Scotch, and the other German. And she had a genealogy that went back in through all of the United States: this uncle had been an engraver in the Philadelphia mint; and Paul Revere had borrowed his horse from Deacon John Larkin, who was her so-and-so (her name was Larkin, the family name was Larkin), so on and so forth, and it went back into England. And at one point in my life, when I was already quite mature, I tried to question my mother's sisters (my mother was then dead) and my father about their background, their history, and what happened to them. And I found out with them (and I have since found out with almost anyone I can recall) that if you were the American-born children of immigrants, the immigrants have practically no history to tell you. I don't

know of any person whose parents were foreign-born where the parents can say, "Oh, we came from such and such, and such and such, and we went back such and such, and such and such and such." Presumably there are some. I'm sure that there are some English people who live here and others who go back far, but at least among those I've asked, and particularly, I would say, among Jewish immigrants, there is a lack of knowledge of their history. So that I know about my father that he came here when he was about fourteen with his father and mother, whose name was Maltz. They came from Lithuania, and I presume from somewhere near the German border; I'm not so sure but that their forebears might not have originally come from Germany, because the name Maltz is fairly common, I've found, in Germany.

But I have no memory. I think that his father was a miller in Lithuania. Why they left, I don't know--maybe for the general reasons that most immigrants did: to seek a better life or to avoid army service or this kind of thing. And I don't even know--I never knew my grandfather, so that he died fairly early along the way. I know that my father had no schooling here, but [he had] a multitude of jobs such as many immigrants had: he was a peddler; he worked in a grocery store; at one point he, I think, painted flowers on cups. He had a certain artistic bent, as a matter of fact. Along the line he seemed to have picked up the knowledge

of how to play the mandolin, because when he courted my mother, whose name was Lena Sherry, he courted her in the course of teaching her how to play the mandolin. And the mandolin was an instrument in our family, when I grew up, that he would occasionally play.

GARDNER: At what point did he come to America? Do you know the date?

MALTZ: Well, I can say this: he died in the year 1934--no, 1933, at the age of fifty-six. So if I get a pencil, I can figure it out.

GARDNER: So that would mean that he was born in 1878, then.

MALTZ: Yes, in 1878. And he worked at a great many jobs. I don't know at what point his father died, and I don't know anything of any brothers, but at some point along the line, before I was born, he became a house painter and met and married my mother. I'll now pause with my mother's family.

She was, I believe, two years older than he and came to this country from Poland as an infant in arms; I think she was about a year old. I was told that her father--no, her grandfather had been some sort of foreman on a rather large estate not far from Warsaw, which is an unusual story for a Jewish man. But you find exceptions in the general history of things, so it may or may not have been true. In any instance, her own father was, I think, a Hebrew teacher, and he died shortly after they came to the United States, leaving

his wife--that is to say, my grandmother on that side--with four daughters and one son. And my grandmother, who was a marvelous human being, apparently made a living on the East Side of New York by being a bootlegger. [laughter] She made bathtub liquor, or Wishnick. (I forget what Wishnick is--it's a brandy, I believe, made out of raisins or prunes, that's what it is.) And she used to apparently lug bottles of this, or pails of this, up the four- and five- and six-flight tenements, and she would sell [it] in order to keep her family alive. And one of her daughters became a schoolteacher; a second one became a bookkeeper; a third one was rather retarded, a bit on the slow side--not excessively so, but I suppose she had some petty jobs; and another one I knew when she was married--what work she did, I didn't know. And then her son at some point along the line went into the navy and remained a career man in the navy for some years. He became a petty officer, chief petty officer. I know that he was in the Philippines around the period, either around--I'd have to check this out--or after, shortly after the period in which the United States was putting down the Aguinaldo insurrection, because in her home there was a book of photographs which I've pored over many times showing Filipinos being garroted and having their heads chopped off and being lined up as prisoners by American soldiers. He had this book of snapshots, and presumably he

had taken them himself. He remained in the navy until I guess I was about ten or twelve. Then he got out and with my father's help (I'm going on like this in no special order) he became a businessman--and at the same time, a confirmed alcoholic. And the alcoholism gradually took over from the businessman, and he died of alcoholism.

GARDNER: Could you fill in some of the names?

MALTZ: Yes, I'll fill in names.

GARDNER: My historian's bent.

MALTZ: Of course. I'm just going along. My father's name was Maltz--it had always been that.

GARDNER: First name?

MALTZ: Bernard. My mother's name was Lena, and her family name had been Sherashevsky but it was changed to Sherry, apparently when they landed on Ellis Island--that kind of deal. One sister was Sadie, and another who was the teacher and who taught all her life in the Brooklyn school system and apparently was quite good at it, was Bertha. Then there was . . . I think I'm leaving out a sister somewhere along here. Wait a minute.

GARDNER: Well, you mentioned the retarded one.

MALTZ: Then there was May, who was the retarded one, slightly retarded. And the man who became the sailor was David. And perhaps we'd pause for a moment while I just think. [tape recorder turned off] There was another daughter whose name

was Ada. She married a man who ran a little penny grocery, a little penny-candy store on a corner in a section of Brooklyn, where he used to get up at about four in the morning in order to receive the newspapers and be ready to sell them to the people who had to start work by 5:30, leave for work by 5:30. He would be up until about eleven at night for the late customers who came in to buy some candy or other little things that those little general stores had. And he died at about forty of a coronary--probably some of it having to do with the intensity of his work to try to earn a living. My mother (and this was very important in my life) wanted very much to be a teacher. But [at] about the age of thirteen or fourteen, she had to go to work in a factory (I believe it was a factory that made buttons or buttonholes in garments) to help out. She was the oldest of the sisters, the oldest of the children. And there she contracted trachoma, which was, as you know, a much more prevalent disease at that time and which Ellis Island tried to keep out but couldn't altogether, and this affected her her whole life. Her vision was saved. I don't know whether the first physician who came into her life was the physician who was in her life for the rest of it, but somewhere along the line she encountered a marvelous German emigré, a tall, slender, Prussian-looking gentleman, by the name of Dr. Denig. I remember his name; I would like to kind of immortalize

it as much as I can. Of course, I don't know whether it was an operation he invented (I have questioned an ophthalmologist about this and he doesn't know), but this would go back now fifty, sixty years. He did operations on her eyes whereby he took skin from the inside of her mouth and transplanted it on the cornea--what is the white part of the eye?

GARDNER: I can add and subtract, but I don't know.

MALTZ: Well, we'll have to get that word. Yes, it's not the pupil, it would be the cornea. And [he] must have done other things. She had a succession of such surgeries, and as a result of this, she was able to see and to function, but she couldn't read. The most she could ever do was to very briefly glance at the headlines of a paper. And out of that, and because she was not an educated woman, because reading was a strain for her, she got the concept that reading was a strain for everybody. As a result, she would say to me, "I don't want you reading this Tom Swift stuff and things like this. I want you to save your eyes until you go to college." Even at that early time when they didn't know whether they would have the money for any of their children to go to college, there was the hope that they would. And so I was forbidden, for instance, to have a library card at any time in my life. And there were no books in the house, except there were a few sets that they obviously had bought because it was the thing to do; they bought a set of

Turgenev and a set of Tolstoy and a couple of other things like this. A set, I remember, of a book on the History of the Jews by Graetz, which, when I had the opportunity, I would sneak little readings. And that was the extent of the reading I did. As a result, I read, when I was an adolescent, Tolstoy--I think it was The Kreutzer Sonata--saying what a bad thing sexual intercourse was, and I read Graetz on how many millions of Jews had been killed by anti-Semites all down the ages. And that was about the extent of my rounded reading.

Now, before I was born, which was in October 1908, my father had an up-and-down career supporting the family. I was the youngest of three; I have two older brothers.

GARDNER: They are. . . ?

MALTZ: My oldest is Edward, who is about seven years older than I. And the middle brother is Ernest; he is about three and a half years older than I. At a certain point I think there was a depression in the United States around 1906, and I know that he tried to make a go as a farmer. They moved out to Freehold, New Jersey, which was a farming community, and there they worked very hard to try to raise potatoes and strawberries, and there are various tales from that year that I wouldn't particularly go into, but that failed also. And about the time it failed, he came back and went to work again as a painter, and fairly quickly he apparently was able to be not just a painter working for someone else

but a small contractor with another man or two working for him. And he would get little contracting jobs. That has a relevance in that about the time that this was so, my mother was pregnant with me, and there was one night, Sunday night, apparently--I just learned this the other night from my brother; I knew of it in general, but he refreshed me--when my father and the man who worked with him went down to the paint shop, which was very near where we lived. We lived at that time in Williamsburg, [Brooklyn], on a street that I wrote down called Vernon Avenue, in Williamsburg. And when they went into the shop, my father apparently went into the back, and the assistant lit a match above an open barrel of turpentine. There was an explosion and he was set on fire, and my father was set on fire. They both ran out, and my father, whether by intelligence or by accident, fell on the ground, and in rolling around, he put out the fire. But the other man became a torch and burned to death. That sent my mother to the hospital for premature delivery, and I was born weighing three-and-a-half pounds. There wasn't any incubator around apparently at that time, or one available--they had them--and so, according to the stories I've been told, I was kept wrapped in cotton wool for about six months.

GARDNER: That's a fiery omen though.

MALTZ: [laughter] Yes.

GARDNER: Almost mythic.

MALTZ: And apparently my father, who was then ill and under the care of some kindly, non-Jewish doctor, and who recovered, somehow so impressed this doctor that he, my father, must have been brash enough to ask, or got hints that the man felt kindly disposed toward him, and borrowed \$1,000. And with that money [he] was able to set up in business again and to proceed. A little later we moved to another area which was apparently Park Avenue, which I remember because my father had a shop, paint shop, downstairs where he just stored his paints and, I think, also kept his horse. I think at that time he still had a horse to navigate around, although he was one of the first men around to purchase an automobile and had one very early. But I remember living upstairs, up a long, long flight of stairs, and looking down. I can remember that as an early memory; it must have been sometime between the time I was two and three. And apparently this was a mixed neighborhood of Irish and Jews at that time. But then, when I was three, and when my father was still a painter but by that time had graduated to an automobile (because I remember driving), he purchased a house in the Flatbush neighborhood. It was about, oh, I can best describe it [as] about a mile from Ebbets Field, old Ebbets Field. Because Ebbets Field, and all that it meant, dominated a good deal of my psychology as a youth. I hoped to become a big-

league ball player. And the very day that we moved in, something happened that I think probably affected me very profoundly.

A group of boys gathered in our backyard. It was on a street which was what you would probably call pleasant, lower-middle class, mostly frame houses of two stories with an attic, all of them having a little patch of grass in front of them, a little patch behind, a little driveway, and all close together. There were some brownstones on that street, but mostly they were the type I described, with maple trees. But that, of course, was a big step up from a Williamsburg slum. And when I asked my brother why [our] father moved there, he said he knew of no reason excepting that he [the father] wanted to make improvements for his family. He wanted them to live better, and this was an opportunity to live better. But there gathered a group of boys, and my brother thinks they were not boys from the street but boys from other streets around, shouting anti-Semitic slogans and throwing some stones-- because I remember the stones broke our back window and cut my lip. And since it's an incident that happened when I was three and I've never forgotten (not that I have dwelled upon it, but it's just something I've never forgotten), it's quite obvious to me that it made me sensitive to anti-Semitism, first of all, but I would say, more importantly than that, sensitive to the whole question of injustice. It was my first experience of something that was not just. And very

early in life, I can remember very early I hated injustice wherever I saw it, to whomever it applied, and I think it came out of that personal incident.

GARDNER: Having brought that up, what. . . . Well, I'm trying to figure out how to phrase this. How much Jewishness was involved in your family upbringing? For example, did your family speak English exclusively, or lots of Yiddish, or. . . ?

MALTZ: No, it's a good question, important question. There was certainly a basic foundation of Jewishness in my upbringing in the sense that we knew we were Jewish, first of all; and second of all, we knew we were Jewish in a Christian neighborhood. Although later all of the boys in the neighborhood became my friends: I played with them; I went to school with them; they were at my home for my birthday; I was at their home for their birthday parties, so that there was not an unpleasant atmosphere at all in any sense. My family kept a kosher home, but they did so only because first my father's mother lived with us. And then afterwards she died, and then my mother's mother came to live with us when her own daughters had married and were away. She lived with us and was a very welcome member of the family; she was such a really warm, lovely human being. But if not for that I'm sure they would not have kept a kosher house.

I remember how startled I was when I was about twelve or so and went on a little automobile ride through several

states in New England with my parents. They had taken me out of school to do it for some reason or other, and I saw my mother order bacon in the morning, and I was just absolutely flabbergasted. She said, "Well, when we're out of the house we do it, it tastes so good." And on the other hand, I also on all high holidays went to synagogue, and this continued until I revolted at about the time I went to college, or even before. [phone rings] And we celebrated Jewish festivals like Passover and so on, and as a matter of fact, at a certain point my father urged that I. . . . Oh, I had to go to Sunday school for a while. I think it was Sunday school where you learned actually history; that's what they taught. It was taught in English. At a later point I remember my father wished that I might read Yiddish, but I was impatient. After school I wanted to be out playing with the boys; I didn't want any of that muck. And now of course I'm sorry; I wish I knew the language. Now, father, for instance, took one English paper and one Yiddish paper. I think he took the English paper for the news and the Yiddish paper because they ran certain serials.

GARDNER: Which paper was it, do you remember?

MALTZ: I remember what it was; it was called the Day. It was neither the Communist nor the Socialist one; it was, I guess, a daily middle-class [paper] or whatever it was, but I believe that they ran short stories and things like that,

and he enjoyed reading them. But he took the English newspaper for the news. Somewhere along the line, without schooling he'd learned how to read and write. Or maybe he had had some night schooling. I don't know. But he was a man who always spoke with an accent even though he had come [to America] at fourteen. It was not a gross accent, but you knew that he was not American-born. With my mother, as I recall, there was no such accent. She spoke as though she had been born in the United States. It was not, let's say, a heavy religious atmosphere. Even my grandmother, who was religious, was never tyrannical about it. She was such a gentle human being, and she was so tolerant that the weight of this never pressed on any of us very much. And I know my desire, which was classical, was to be as American as possible. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted the approval of my peers, naturally.

There was something else, however, in the early psychology which was important, and it was part of the awareness of anti-Semitism. I remember my father's attitude was that a Jew must learn to fight. Very interesting; it was the opposite of meekness. He had been the witness to a pogrom in the village in which he lived, a village that was obliterated during World War I. And he told stories of how a powerful man, the butcher--I think he was the butcher; maybe he was the blacksmith--came out with a club in which he had studded

nails and swung that club around, hitting the local anti-Semitic citizenry who were looting and pillaging and so on. And my father said, "You've got to fight." I remember his telling with absolute delight, and repeating it more than once, the story of an old Jew who had a pushcart on the East Side and whose beard was pulled by a hulking anti-Semite. A small man next to him said, "Don't you ever do that again," and this guy turned around on him and started to hit him, and the small man turned out to be a Jewish boxer. He beat the daylights out of the big man, and my father told that with great relish. Now, that affected my psychology because, although I was not brought up in an atmosphere such as others were, where there were real gangs around and where one lived a life of fists, I was prepared to fight and I did fight. Not only that, but as I grew older I wanted boxing lessons, and I got them from a pro. Now, this obviously came to the point of neurosis, because when I was at Columbia University in my freshman year, I was continuing to take lessons from a pro, and I was preparing to enter the Golden Gloves. Now, this is of course too contradictory; by that time I should have been over it. But nevertheless I had that in me as part of my psychology: you don't lay down, you fight--maybe you lose, but you fight.

Apparently my early years, as I recall them, were years of tremendous physical activity. I was fortunate in

that I lived on a straight street without too much traffic and where there were other children my age. So that before we went to school, or then after we went to school, when we came back, and weekends were spent in incessant physical activity. My friends for the most part weren't readers, although they did some of it. I, as I've told you, didn't have the opportunity; but I didn't miss it, because I was glad to get up in the morning and, whatever the season, there might be two or three hours of punchball. If you know that game, it's generally not known out West here.

GARDNER: I grew up in New York.

MALTZ: Oh, you grew up in New York. Then another season there would be touch football, and it would be ring-a-levio, if you know that game--chasing everybody around like hare and hounds--and then it would be roller skates. And when one roller skate ran off, broke up, you went on one roller skate and used the other foot. And then after a while most people were able to afford bikes, and I'll always remember my sadness that I was the last boy among my group who was able to afford a bike. I was riding bikes for hours. And there was playing handball. Life was physical, and that was what you wanted all the time. That was my existence. There was really certainly never any intellectual talk around my family because they didn't have it within them. Excepting that there was native intelligence there; there could be thoughts

about things. I remember my father, for instance, was very proud to be an American. This was genuinely the land of opportunity to him, and he was so very proud of it. This came in later, because at a time when he was very ill in a hospital, and I was taking state examinations which were obligatory for all high school graduates and suddenly was confronted with an essay to write, it clicked with my father lying ill in a hospital (I'll explain later, he was having his legs amputated): I wrote about my father and what he felt about America, which I felt, having embodied it from him.

But at the same time that there was this kind of life, there was also apparently a preparation in me of what I guess analysts call "free-floating anxiety." Without attempting to assess what this came out of, I think it came out of parents who demanded, who gave approval when you excelled, who gave approval when you achieved, who didn't give approval unless you performed according to their expectations. That would be my general judgment. I know that very early I had the concept that I needed to try to excel in anything I did, whether this was in athletics or whether it was when I first went to school. That was part of it. But I also recall that when I first went to school--I never had kindergarten; other children did. I don't know whether my parents were just ignorant of it or what. At that time there weren't

private kindergartens; maybe there were for wealthy people, but there was nothing like that in my aura, my ambience. But when I went to school, for about the first year as I can recall, I ran all the way to school in the morning in order to be on time. I don't suppose the school was more than about a half a mile away, but that after all wasn't necessary and was a sign, I think, of already there, at the age of six I guess I was, of that kind of built-in anxiety. I do think that several things not unimportant in my background were the fact that there was an extended family. When we had Passover it was held at our home, and the aunts and their husbands all came. And then as they had children, all came, and I had a sense of having family and of being cherished by more than just my immediate parents, but [also] by this aunt and that uncle and so on down the line. And I think that had an effect upon me.

Now, somewhere along in my childhood and before 1918, which would have made me ten years old, probably when I was maybe only about five, my father branched out from being a house painter to becoming a small builder. And he would build--I guess he started with one-family houses, but presently, I know by World War I he had several apartment houses, and that's when he began to go nuts. Because in World War I coal was in short supply; as a result, water pipes froze, tenants called up, you couldn't get money for more building. And I

remember I grew up--oh yes, this is very important: although later my father made money, my psychology never went along with what happened to it. I grew up with the feeling of poverty. Now, my wife Esther really grew up in poverty. She grew up in that kind of poverty that I never knew where she knew that if she would say, "No, I've had enough, mother," then her mother would eat one piece of bread, say, or half an egg. And if she didn't say that, while being hungry herself, her mother wouldn't eat anything. Well, I never had that. But I grew up knowing that the kids around the block had water pistols that cost ten cents, or maybe they were even a quarter at that time. Remember what a water pistol was? I wanted a water pistol. My mother said, "We haven't got money for a water pistol. You can't have a water pistol." And I grew up with the psychology that we were poor. It was not so much poor; rather, the more accurate phrase was "money is tight." Money was tight. It was always tight. That went on for years like that, that money was tight, and that affected my psychology a great deal.

Now, at this point--oh yes, one thing that came into the house moderately early, perhaps. . . . I don't know, it must have been perhaps--no, I guess it was after the war, because during the war my father wouldn't have the money, but he bought a Victrola. And with it were perhaps a half a dozen records. Now, at that time you wound up each time you played one record,

and these were all great arias: [Amelita] Galli-Curci singing from--I forget what it's named; it's about the fisherman-- and Caruso singing his Pagliacci, and so on. Something in me instantly responded to that music. I used to play that hour after hour after hour. Although later, when my parents tried to give me music lessons, I hated every minute of it, quit it as soon as possible. But I loved to listen to that music. Now I don't enjoy opera because I can't stand the recitative that goes on in between, but great arias as well as, of course, all orchestral and chamber music and so on, are things I love. And actually, I work to music.

GARDNER: Oh, is that so?

MALTZ: Yes. I didn't always used to, but I learned about working to music, oh, it goes back now about eight, ten years ago. Almost all day long I have music on. Usually it's baroque music, gentle music. It's not usually orchestral, although sometimes it may be. And it's never voice, never voice, because that interferes. But I find it benign, and for that reason I'm delighted with KUSC.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

FEBRUARY 13, 1975

GARDNER: Now you were talking about your musical. . . .

MALTZ: Well, just talking about the music, but that's all it meant. We never had any collection of records or anything like that. But as frequently with families of that sort, at a given age my oldest brother was given piano lessons, and then the next brother was given violin lessons. Now, each of them had some interest in music and did some practicing and learned how to play a bit. But I never liked it when my turn came.

GARDNER: What instrument were you doing?

MALTZ: A violin, and I did it only out of dutifulness. And at rather an early age for me, because I was "a good boy," I said, "I don't want it. I don't like it. I don't want to do it." And it went side by side with the fact that at certain evenings the son of a tailor--there was a man who had a tailor shop in the area, his son was rather a good violinist--and on a Friday night, when the music teacher came to teach my second oldest brother, Ernest, he and the music teacher and the son of the tailor would come and play music at the house. I always enjoyed that very much. At a certain age along the way, when things were a little easier, we went to an occasional concert, especially one that was recommended by the music teacher, who said a friend of his

was having a debut at Carnegie Hall or something like that. But we never had any record collection or anything like that. And as a matter of fact, when I went to college I had just a little box that you carried; you put on one record at a time and wound it up one at a time. And I had half a dozen Bach records--I was very fond of Bach at that time--and that was all that I ever had. It was a cultural education [that] was sort of very spotty. My parents did go to the Yiddish theater, but I didn't know Yiddish. I knew at that time some pidgin Yiddish because my grandmother knew practically no English--she could understand a few words, but she only spoke Yiddish--and I could get along with her but have lost all of that really because I was twice married to women who were not Jewish. Now that I am married to a woman who is Jewish and who knows Yiddish, I'm beginning to relearn some words that I knew as a child. And I have recently been reading, with fascination, Leo Rosten's extraordinary book about "the joys of Yiddish." I think that's an absolutely magical book. I have known him in the past, not well, but I never realized what a truly erudite and brilliantly witty man he was.

Oh, that reminds me of something which is really absolutely precious. I thought I had it down, and, you see, I think I look over too quickly--no, I see I have it here. When I was a resident here in I guess my mid-thirties, over

at the house as a guest one evening was Ralph Greenson, the psychoanalyst, called Romy by friends. And I don't know what prompted it, but I related a story that when I first went to Europe, and went to the board of health in Brooklyn for my birth certificate, there was none for me. There was one that gave my birthdate and the names of my parents and the correct address--but the first name was Romeo Maltz. And instantly Romy Greenson said, "My father delivered you." He said his father was a general practitioner and a nut on Shakespeare, and every child he delivered he wrote down a Shakespearean first name for them. [laughter] So I had to officially have a name change, and I still have a copy of that original Romeo Maltz birth certificate. Isn't that a fantastic coincidence?

GARDNER: That's wonderful.

MALTZ: Well. . . .

GARDNER: We won't discuss the obvious ways in which that might have influenced you.

MALTZ: Well, it didn't very much, unfortunately. [laughter] More fantasy I think than anything else. Anyway, I didn't discover it until I was already in college, you see, because I never went to Europe before then.

GARDNER: At this time we're talking really about when you would have been in grammar school.

MALTZ: Well, we're talking about the time I started grammar

school. I started grammar school at the conventional age of about six.

GARDNER: Would there have been any added influences due to the fact that your brothers--your older brother now would be in junior high school?

MALTZ: They didn't have junior high schools then.

GARDNER: Well, then--oh, I see, he would be around eighth or ninth grade then.

MALTZ: They were both older and their lives, although we were part of the same family, were rather separate from mine. They were both older. They had things in common that I didn't. Their friends on the block were an older group; I played with a younger group. And it was not like growing up with a brother who is, let's say, just a year older than you. One was about six years older, six and a half, the other three and a half to four. And I was the kid brother. (If you can believe on the telephone my middle brother still says, "Hey, kid." You know, that was the atmosphere.)

When I began in school, I was a dutiful student. I must say, for the schooling that we had--we had a school in which the classes were so crowded at one point that I remember that for a period of about two years another boy and I shared one desk, which meant that each of us sat on one buttock for the entire day. But by gosh, we learned geography, we learned certain basic elements of history--probably some of them

gravely inaccurate, but we learned them. But the geography was accurate, and I mention that because you know I had occasion not too long ago to be at the home of a physician and his intelligent wife and his intelligent son. This intelligent son goes to Beverly Hills High School, and I said, "Did you ever have a class in geography?" He said no. I said, "Do you know where Istanbul is?" He said no. I said, "Do you know where Rio de Janeiro is?" He said no. He doesn't know the world in which he lives!

GARDNER: That's incredible.

MALTZ: But I have since heard that this is largely true of almost all people entering colleges; they have absolutely no knowledge of geography. There are some schools that apparently combine geography with aspects of sociology so that people do get a sense of places. But I know that I still can recall, you know, that Peru produces a certain kind of basic crop and basically where it is in Latin America. We had to make maps. And I feel that in many respects I was infinitely better educated than a great many who are going to school today. Although when I was living in Mexico City, some young friends of mine who were going to what was called the American School there, which had combined American and Mexican students and which taught some classes in Spanish, everyone was bilingual. They were already reading things in literature that I was not assigned until I came into college.

The literature was much more advanced, and I believe that the literature that is read even today in, say, good high schools in the United States is much more advanced. Just as I was told, I remember, when I was in England in 1959, Galsworthy is really only read by high school boys or whatever they called them at that time . . . high school boys--probably schoolboys. This was shortly before they had a radio program a few years later in which Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga was so successful, and then they had a TV thing. And now I think Galsworthy, whom I consider one of the great modern masters, finally came into his own again. But in so many respects it seems to me that I was given a better foundation in education than many young people are getting today in school. I know that as one of my first obligatory English classes in college--and there were only two and I only took two--I had to do composition, one composition a week, to learn how to write. And apparently this is one of the gravest problems today, that so many students can't write anything. They cannot put sentences together. I suppose it's one of the results of TV, but also it must have something to do with the way writing is taught in school. A most unfortunate development. Anyway, I went to school. . . .

GARDNER: What was the school, by the way, just to have. . . ?

MALTZ: Oh, it was a little school in Brooklyn called PS 92. And when I had occasion to visit in Brooklyn in the year '59,

PS 92 was still there but had been rebuilt and was carrying on. And that school had a very mixed population; it was for the most part, oh, I'd say very mixed. One type that rather stood out were some very poor Italians who lived in a kind of a Hooverville about a mile away from the school, but who came very neatly dressed to elementary school. Although I once wrote a story based upon the fact that one Saturday morning I saw one of the girls in my class walking barefoot, following her father with a pushcart, walking through our street, looking through rubbish barrels. But when they came to school they were neat. [sound interference-- tape recorder turned off] Otherwise I think practically all the children were lower middle class or poor. I remember once a year, or twice a year, there would be examinations for head lice. And at that time, if you had head lice you had to leave the school; your hair was shorn; the only treatment they had for it was kerosene, that I can recall. I remember the bitter tears on the part of one young girl when she had to leave school. Classes were orderly. There was no cutting up. When you think of what happens nowadays in what we read of schools, there was none of that in our area. Of course, in other areas of New York I'm sure that things were different. This was basically a lower-middle-class to poor area where I think all parents wanted their children to get an education.

GARDNER: I think for the most part in those days education was revered to the extent that. . . .

MALTZ: Revered a great deal. All I know is, for instance, in Harlem kids were getting an education; they were getting some sort of an education, because when I was a member of a theater group in the mid-thirties and we put on a play in which almost all of the actors were black actors, they all knew how to read and write damn well. And there were people of literacy. So there have been massive sea changes in a city like New York since I grew up there. I do know that when Halloween came we all had the custom of changing, taking our jackets and putting them on inside out, because on that day you could put flour in a long black stocking and hit other kids in the back. But we were always afraid of the Italian children because they put stones and broken glass in their stockings. They were a tougher element--poorer and tougher. I'm sure today they are magistrates and so on. And out of our area, different from other areas of Brooklyn, such as one of my dearest friends who grew up in, I think, basically the Williamsburg area, a great many of his young friends ended up in Sing Sing and in the electric chair, or as gangsters.

GARDNER: The old Murder Incorporated.

MALTZ: Yes. But that didn't happen in my area, to anyone I knew. One, I remember, went on to become a teacher; the

second one, poor fellow, became a paraplegic in World War II; the third one, I never knew what happened to him educationally, but his father was a minor executive of Standard Oil Company; another one was an accountant. And so on. It's a different kind of atmosphere.

By the time World War I ended--oh, I must say that World War I had a great effect upon me because I learned how to read, let's say, in about the first year of elementary school, I would think. I would then read the newspapers, so that I was very well aware at that time of things like the Battle of Verdun and the Battle of the Somme--90,000 men dead in one day and 40,000 prisoners--and poison gas and tanks. I was around, like other children, selling bonds, selling war bonds to neighbors, and collecting scrap and doing other such things. And [I was] also very well aware that a couple of my uncles were in the army and going to Camp Upton, which was in New Jersey. [I remember] watching a parade once of soldiers. This had an important effect on me, because after World War I, by the time I was in high school, there was the reaction to the fact that World War I was an imperialist war fought to divide up territories and gain markets, and there was a great deal of debunking of the war. The very first political position that I ever took in my life occurred in high school when I developed a pacifist attitude toward war, and that was very important.

The horror of World War I was borne in upon me very, very deeply. But certainly during elementary school I was just a patriotic American boy who believed all of the stories of German atrocities, some of which were true and some were not. I didn't know of anything else that was occurring, such as the fact that the French were not shelling certain German factories in which they had financial interests, and that kind of thing. And I do remember one very important thing: when Allenby, General Allenby--when the Balfour Declaration was declared, there was great excitement in my family. I remember that we went to synagogue, and I remember that everybody around was excited because something new was going to happen for the Jewish people.

I don't know about growing up in New York City now, or many other cities, but it seems to me that there was much more sensitivity to anti-Semitism in the United States at that time than there is now, purely because there was more active anti-Semitism. I always remembered that when I went to camp one of my counselors had been a Princeton quarterback who had studied engineering, and the great question was, in spite of the fact that he was Princeton and a quarterback and All-American, whether he would get a job as an engineer because the engineering profession seemed to be closed to Jews. And the kind of awareness that I think I had of anti-Semitism all through childhood, even though, as I say, most

of my friends for the most part were non-Jewish, I just don't have now. I very definitely lost it when I went to live in Mexico, where I never felt anything like that at all. But I think that the world changed in that respect and, God knows, can change again, depending upon world events. I seem to remember very earnest teachers in elementary school, teachers who really tried to give us our basic tools of learning. And I remember something most fascinating which is very different today, which is that in my last year of elementary school, which meant I was thirteen going on fourteen, the question was put: How many children are going to high school? (Because at that time, as I recall, there was no sixteen-year-old limit; you could immediately go to work from elementary school. In fact, I don't think you even had to finish elementary school.) And with satisfaction our teacher saw about half the children in the class say they were going on to high school. I remember later, when I graduated from high school, there was the question, "How many are going on to college?" and there was a small minority of hands that said they were going on to college--but only a small minority. The situation now, where such a vast portion of young people go on to one type of college or another, is a day-to-night difference from what it was when I was a child. There was a very small minority of us who ever went to college.

Now, something very important in my life, which I didn't realize at that time was important, occurred when I was about

nine, I think. I was in a grade such as 2B, something like that, 2B or 3B. I got a very severe pneumonia and was out of school for about three months. Apparently behind the pneumonia there was a hidden polio that was not recognized, and was not recognized, I would say, for about fifty years. Because, although it turned out (some time ago I found out) that my left foot is half an inch less wide than my right and that the arches of each foot are different from the other, my gait was never affected, or at least I compensated in such a way that it was never affected. No doctor ever saw it. Army doctors never saw it; no athletic director ever saw it. And I assumed that when someone played two or three sets of tennis, his feet ached. And I assumed that when someone stood in a museum for an hour, his feet ached. I didn't know that other people didn't. All I knew is that I could never be an elevator man, let's say, or work behind a counter in a store. Of course, I knew my feet couldn't take it, and along the line I did various things to try and compensate for my problem. For instance, by the time I was in my thirties and able to afford it, I used to buy two sets of shoes each time I bought a pair of shoes--one size six, and the other six and a half--and I'd throw away one of each, and that way have one. Or else I would buy a pair of shoes, and I would take a stretcher and work on the right one and work on the right one until sometimes I almost burst the seams

in order to make that one large enough so that the left one would work. And actually it was not until I was living in Mexico and once happened to mention this to an internist that he sent me to a bright orthopedist. And I said, "You know, I've always had great trouble with my shoes, and I've tried to have shoes made in Mexico because I heard that Mexican craftsmen were very good. But I've had no success, and I think that I just have unequally sized feet because I had a badly sprained ankle in baseball once." He said, "That wouldn't have any relationship to your problem." He said, "You've either had a hidden polio at one time in your life, or else you had a very rare form of meningitis which would cause this." So, for the first time in my life, when I was already, I believe, in my fifties, I had a thorough examination, and he found that my entire left side was weaker than my right, that my left thigh and calf were smaller than my right thigh and calf, but never so noticeable that even stripped in gym anybody knew. And you know, I made the tennis team in college, and I made records in swimming, and that kind of thing, and I didn't notice. But that's why I wear these shoes nowadays, which are built to a mold and help me out. But I had this hidden polio as a kid and never knew about it.

GARDNER: That's fascinating. And never knew about it.

MALTZ: Never knew about it; nobody knew it at that time.

I was reminded of that fact because in 1917, which means when I was nine, in the summer there was a great polio epidemic in the United States, and as many parents as could afford it got their children out of town. Now my second [brother], Ernest, the middle brother, had had asthma as a child, and so my parents scrounged up the money to get him to go to camp because that was thought to be good for him. But neither my oldest brother nor I went away that summer. But when the epidemic came along, my parents packed us into their little auto, and we went up to that camp and stayed there until school reopened, as it did about a month late. I don't think school reopened until about mid-October or late October in the year 1917. And that was the first summer, I think, I maybe had spent out of town. I think, on the contrary, there probably were little vacations of about two weeks in the year, or one week in the year, when my mother would be able to go up with us children to some summer place in the Catskills and have a cheap room for vacation. My father might join her on the weekend.

But thereafter my father's fortunes went better as American capitalism went better. After World War I there was rather a building boom. I remember there was another little bust around 1922, but there was a building boom and a good deal of speculation in real estate, of which my father took advantage, and he was apparently an extremely

adept man in sizing up the value of real estate. I know he would come in and say, "I bought a lot today for \$8,000." And a week later he would say, "I sold it for \$11,000." And then later it might be twenty [thousand dollars], and then it might be thirty. So he made some money there, and he made enough money to begin building on a larger scale. He was a man with a good deal of enterprise. There was a section of Brooklyn called Parkway Gardens that was once merely a horse ranch. And it was he who bought the ranch, and he built about twenty-five one-family houses, and thereafter, others built more--he built more. All of Astoria [Queens] was nothing until he built about the first fifty houses or something. And Varick Street in New York, which is now a basic area of industrial buildings, was all brownstone buildings; he built the first industrial building on Varick Street. So he was obviously a man with a considerable amount of vision. As he went along he acquired a good deal of property, a considerable amount of money, and then, fortunately, smelled the Depression of 1929 coming. And unlike many another man who had kept building new properties and then financing the way they were going by getting a mortgage to buy another one, and paying off the last one with the new mortgage, but never really having enough cash, and when cash was called for during the Depression, they went broke, my father smelled the situation and sold out half

of his holdings for cash to partners and was able to weather the Depression in good fashion. That was a very fortunate thing for him--and for us as well.

Now, I could go into high school. I've made no notes on it. High school has a few important things.

GARDNER: Well, we could just begin. I have about ten minutes more tape.

MALTZ: Well, if you have about ten minutes more tape, let me give you a little. . .

GARDNER: Well, let me ask a question or two.

MALTZ: Sure.

GARDNER: At this point, since you're entering high school, your brother, your eldest [brother], would have already been of college age. Did he in fact go on to college?

MALTZ: No, my oldest brother did not. He was just old enough to be drafted in 1917, and he was going to be drafted, I think, and then the war ended. At that time my father's business was very bad, and the question was what to do with him. And at that time textiles began to boom, so my father said, "Aha! Textiles," and he went to a textile industrial school in Philadelphia.

GARDNER: It's still there, Philadelphia Textile.

MALTZ: Is it?

GARDNER: Yeah.

MALTZ: He learned all about textiles, which he hated, and

in the summer he worked in a textile factory, which he abhorred. And by the time the war was over, by the time that period was over, textiles took a drop and he never went back into textiles. My second brother never finished high school. He was not very good at studies, although he's a very intelligent man. He was not good at formal studies, and at a given point, he got into an argument with a teacher and hit him, and he was kicked out of school. Thereupon he went to work with my father and began to learn the building business, and he learned a good deal and became a very successful man himself. He happens to be a man who very early developed a great passion as a fisherman and also as a hunter, and all in him that might have gone into creative study--and didn't--went into the creative work of being a real fisherman. For instance, when he goes fishing (and this has gone on many years) he never buys lures; he comes along with a box of tools and with different types of feathers which he's gotten. There may be a camel hair from Tibet, whatever. And he goes to a lake, to a stream where other people are fishing and not catching anything, and he takes the temperature of the water, and he sees what the fish are biting on, and he sits down and makes the proper little fly and throws it in--and now he starts to catch. As soon as he catches them, he counts the number of scales, and then he puts a little bind on them and makes a notation and puts the fish

right back. He works with the fish and game commission in order to improve the stock of fish, and works this way. His knowledge of fish. . . . He was able to prove, for instance, that trout could live to a much larger size and to a longer age if you didn't take them at a too early age from a certain stream in New Jersey. He established a whole thing about that. And as a duck hunter, for instance, he doesn't--like others [do]--say, "Well, let's go hunting next Tuesday." He waits until a chief of police in New Jersey calls him up and says, "Hey, Ernie, the barometer is dropping." He drops whatever he is doing, gets his gear, and goes out, because that's when the ducks are going to land, and he knows it. [laughter] He comes back with some ducks. It's been a very interesting thing, and he's been able to spend a good deal of his life, on the one hand, managing some buildings and doing some business and, on the other hand, fishing and hunting for half of each year. He fishes for trout, he goes up to Canada to fish, goes to Florida to fish bonefish, never goes out on a boat to fish a big fish; it's always the fish that you have to catch delicately, gives you a long fight. Occasionally he will keep a fish like a salmon to eat, or a bluefish; for the most part he catches them and puts them back. And his wife is also a superb fisherman.

GARDNER: Fascinating.

MALTZ: Yes. Now, in high school. . . .

GARDNER: High school, now, is really. . . .

MALTZ: There were no junior high school.

GARDNER: So it's really from eighth to ninth grade, then, isn't it?

MALTZ: I guess so. I went from the age of six to fourteen, and then I had four years of high school. So, what would that be--eight grades and four more?

GARDNER: What high school?

MALTZ: I went to Erasmus [Hall] High School in New York. By the way, the entire district in which I was brought up is apparently now either totally or partially black. It's very interesting. When I went back in 1959, I found that the street on which I lived was half-populated by black people already. And I regret to say that the park in which I spent a lot of happy times, Prospect Park, which would be so free and easy, and we'd walk on a Friday night (I'd go by myself to feed squirrels, which I loved to do), is now so dangerous that one dare not enter it at night and scarcely in the daytime. That's a most unhappy development. And I think Erasmus Hall High School has now become largely black. Erasmus Hall, incidentally, when I went there, had a pre-revolutionary building in which some classes were carried on, an old wooden building in the center of what was a stone high school.

Erasmus was very good for me too, on the whole--except for geometry, which I could never comprehend. I remember particularly a small, thin, elderly lady who loved poetry,

and the way she taught poetry to us was merely to read aloud Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth. That was all. I suppose she gave us some talks in between, but mostly I remember her reading beautifully these poets. I had never read any poetry in my life before, and I came to love them. I thought they were so beautiful, these poets. And that's what a good teacher can accomplish. I remember once walking down the street with her on an icy day when we both happened to leave the school at the same time. For some reason or another as we were going along I kept slipping and falling on the ice and falling down. She was asking me, "Are you going to college?" When I said, "Yes, I am going to college," she just became radiant. There was a devoted teacher, that one of her students would go to college. And she had seen that I was interested in the poetry, because I remember asking her some questions about it.

GARDNER: At this point, then, you were beginning to read some more.

MALTZ: At this point I still was not allowed to have a library card. Oh, I haven't talked about summer camp, which was important, because I started in to go to camp in 1919. I was still in elementary school, and I went to camp thereafter every summer until I finished my sixteenth year.

GARDNER: Which camp? Where was it?

MALTZ: I went to several camps. One was in Pennsylvania;

I think it was called Harlan. And the second was in New Hampshire and it was called Norbey. And my interest there was all athletics, with one new development that came in, which was drama. There was a teacher at the first school, at the first camp, who then moved up to the second as well, who was a dramatics teacher who loved Shakespeare and put on plays. I asked to be in a play, and I evidently had certain abilities as an actor compared to the other kids. So after lunch, instead of resting as we usually did since all morning it was baseball and then swimming, I would go and rehearse for a play. And I was in play after play from a fairly early age on. I don't know, I never conceived of becoming an actor, but I think it led to an orientation of interest in the theater. I believe I started to say earlier that I never saw theater particularly. My parents went to the Yiddish theater.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: And since I didn't know Yiddish, I didn't go along. But at a certain point they took me to a couple of plays, and I watched them with some amusement because a couple of them were burlesque, and they told me a little of the sense of it.

GARDNER: Would that have been in Brooklyn or in Second Avenue?

MALTZ: It was in New York, Second Avenue I think--yes, surely that. But then at a certain point in my life, I remember

going with my older brother to Broadway, where I saw Cyrano de Bergerac with a man who made it his vehicle for a long time. (I forget his name. He was very well known and very good at it.) And oh, how I loved it, how I wept, how enchanted I was! I had the experience that a million others have had the world over in finding myself absolutely captivated by the theater. And from then on, when I had the opportunity I did go to the theater, and that particularly developed when I was at college. Then I used to go to the theater. But I'm going ahead of myself, because there were certain things else that happened in high school that were important.

GARDNER: Well, the camp interests me too because it seems to me that that was an avant-garde thing to be doing.

MALTZ: Oh, I forgot something very important which I must take up in my next time--or if you have more time I'll do it even tonight. My life was dominated at an early age by the fact that my father was ill. My first memory of my father was of his fainting. Whatever he had that caused him to faint, I saw him fall to the floor in his nightgown, up on the second floor where we lived. My room was adjacent to my parents'. And during World War I, during bitter weather when he had to go out in the cold on tasks, in an unheated automobile of course, he developed frostbite. Now, I have never known the entire truth about this, but he

was diagnosed by the end of World War I as having Buerger's disease. Do you know what that is? Well actually, there was a man called Dr. Buerger who dealt with trench feet on the part of American soldiers during the war--trench feet came in cold and wet feet--and developed a certain injection to improve the circulation. My father went to him and was declared to have Buerger's disease. It was subsequently told to me that it was more likely to have been arteriosclerosis of the legs, because Buerger's disease was usually a young man's disease, and my father was already, I guess, in his forties. But whether it was or not, I don't know; it was officially declared to be Buerger's disease. And there began a long period of problems with his legs.

Even before that, I became very sensitive, as did both my brothers, to the question of health. I remember one year when we were going away to camp my father suddenly had an embolism--not a stroke in his brain, but an embolism which paralyzed him on one side for several days. And he couldn't speak at the time. But we were sent away to camp anyway, and the embolism dissolved and he recovered. But he had a number of those which were already a sign of a circulatory problem. Now, he was a chain smoker, or he was a heavy smoker of cigarettes.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 13, 1975

MALTZ: My father had a number of these embolisms. He also had stomach trouble which we were aware of. I think he probably had high blood pressure, because I grew up to learn, when I came in contact with others, that they salted their food in a way that I didn't and I still don't. I'll get a restaurant dish and I'll say, "I'm sorry, I can't eat it; it's too salty for me." And my wife cooks practically without salt, and I never add salt. So I imagine that he must have had that, although I wasn't told it as such.

But at about the time of 1918, 1919, he was having great trouble with his feet. I know he used to have mustard baths at night. And he also, at a given time, bought a machine, an electric machine, that was placed in my room. He would come into my room perhaps around 6:00 in the morning because I had to get up by about 6:30 or 7:00 to go to school. As a matter of fact, my first two years in Erasmus High School I had to be there at 8:00, and I was through by 12:30. It was that kind of a split session. And he would sit with a blanket over his head, reading the Yiddish newspaper, as I recall, and having some electric treatment for his legs that was supposed to improve them. Whether or not it helped, I don't know. He had had his stomach trouble all

along. He was a big man, husky, but he put on weight too early, at about the age of thirty-five. And at various times, as he could afford it he would go away for certain periods to Hot Springs, Arkansas, alone or with my mother, and that was supposed to be good for him--a lessening of tension, I think. But I know that there was a great deal of tension between them in their marriage, I think purely on a sexual basis. They liked each other, and they really loved each other, but there was a very bad sexual adjustment, and this caused a great deal of tension. (This I didn't know at the time, I found out later.)

In any instance, there came one day when I was seventeen when my father who had for about a year and a half been going to Dr. Buerger weekly for injections (no longer could drive a car, by the way, he had a chauffeur) came back from having had one injection, and whether the substance in the injection was not sound or not, it closed off circulation in the leg, and there came about three days of my father lying in bed, screaming. He was screaming and screaming so that you could hear it halfway down the block, the doctors coming in consultations. He was finally taken to Mount Sinai, where he was put in a room that was padded, and you could hear his screams down the hall. He smoked cigarettes between amputations, and I mention that because, if indeed he had Buerger's disease, there is no known case of Buerger's

disease that is not caused by cigarette smoking; and there is no case of Buerger's disease that has not been arrested when the person stopped smoking, and there's no case of Buerger's disease that has not advanced if the person continued smoking. Of course, there are poor people who have continued to smoke, been unable to stop, and first a leg has been taken off, and then another leg, and then a hand, and then another hand, and they can't stop smoking. So whether it was arteriosclerosis or whatever, my father had both legs amputated. It was at this point at which I found in myself, not consciously, but as I look back on it, a certain kind of ability to communicate that my mother didn't have with him and my brothers didn't have with him. Because I would go in and say to him, "Look, you're still a man," because he felt, you know, a terrible depression. "And you are the man--your brain and your mind and your heart." It was at that time that I was graduating and coming up for these college boards, I guess they were, or whatever the hell they were.

GARDNER: Regents.

MALTZ: Regents, and I wrote this thing I did on my thoughts about my father and his illness and his being an American. At that time both my oldest brother and myself (my youngest was working in the business, carrying on for my father) got mononucleosis. But it was before mononucleosis was a recog-

nized disease, so we were not told to go to bed. I was then a freshman in college. My father was six months in the hospital at that time because he healed very poorly. A young man who goes to war and has a leg shot off, the wound heals within a week or two. But with my father, because of the bad circulation, it didn't heal; it went very badly and very slowly. And so we dragged around, and I became so trembly that I had to leave college. We both were unwell for months, but we kept trying to go every day to the hospital to see him.

We lived in Brooklyn and Sinai was up at Ninety-ninth Street and somewhere or other. . . . That reminds me, I made a marvelous friend during that time that he was ill. I used to walk the streets sometimes when I wasn't with him, and there was a little lady, little black lady, who had a bookstore. Now I was able to get books and borrow them, and she loaned them and sold them very cheaply. Then she took an interest in me, and she told me with great pride that her son was becoming a biochemist, and he was working as a Pullman porter in order to do so. (Well, not a Pullman porter, I think just a porter in Grand Central Station.) But I always remember that woman because she was very motherly toward me, and she liked my interest in books which was newly awakened for the first time.

Ah, but there is one thing about books. When I went

to high school, somewhere around my junior year, aside from doing the homework that I always did, all my free time was in sports. I discovered a book written by an English journalist which was a muckraking job on World War I, and said what dirt had gone on during World War I. And I used to take my lunch, I guess a sandwich from home, whatever, and instead of going to the cafeteria to eat, I bought a little bottle of milk, and I would run up to a certain place in the library where that book was. I didn't take it to a desk, because they had desks there, I'd somehow just take the book out, as though I weren't allowed to, and put it on top of the bookstand, and eat my lunch and read that book. And a powerful effect it had upon me in learning what had gone on during World War I; it had a very powerful effect on my mind at that time. But I can't remember reading much else except the little sneak reading that I did in Tolstoy at a wrong time in my life. I remember I owned a copy of Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea that I kept hidden up on a shelf. When my parents went out on a Saturday night, I would get the book and I would read for a while, and then I would put it up and go to sleep. By the time I went into college, I met a lot of young men, particularly a young friend that had a lot of influence on me for a while who had read all sorts of things, you know, Dickens and all the people you could name. I hadn't read anything, nothing at all.

That was how I started. I wanted to do well in grades because that was taken for granted, but my chief aim was to make the swimming team and the tennis team. And we can go on from there.

GARDNER: Have you covered all you. . . ?

MALTZ: High school?

GARDNER: No, not high school, we can finish up with that. Have you said all you wanted about your father's illness and its effect on you?

MALTZ: Well, it was very complicated, really. For a while we all had the silly notion that we could somehow hide the fact that his legs had been removed, that he could get prostheses--which were then far, far inferior to what they have now--and that somehow we would keep it a secret. It was as though it was a dirty thing that had happened, and not just a sad thing. Now, of course if my mother--her mother had been a wiser woman than she evidently was. . . . There would have been none of this nonsense. But for a while we tried to keep it a secret, and finally it came out.

We went to the country when he was finally let out of the hospital. There was about a four-month period when we went up to Monticello, New York, where he got a house, and he had a nurse with him. I spent the summer with him, and sometime during that summer he got his first pair of prostheses with which he could walk very badly, but he walked. By God,

that man went on, and he went on in business to do other things. He went to Europe, walking on the whole like an automaton--calling attention to himself and so on. But he had a strong spirit for which I admire him very much. I wish that I had been older and been able to understand him better, understand my mother better and so on. I have the pictures of my grandmother and so on that I can show you tonight perhaps--sometime. But I think he was a very enterprising man. I once asked an attorney who had been his attorney what sort of a man he was, and he said, "He was one of the nicest and most honorable men I've ever met in my life." And I don't think it was said out of special partiality; I think it was probably so. He seemed quite a good guy, a very good guy. Why don't we kind of finish off now, and I'll listen back before our next session.

GARDNER: And we'll come back to high school a little bit and on to college.

[Second Part] (August 5, 1976)

GARDNER: As we just discussed, we had talked about your father, and we're going to come back and discuss your high school years at Erasmus.

MALTZ: Yes. Well, I made some notes and tried to sum up what high school was for me and what it did, and I would say that its general role was a benign one. It increased my

capacity for learning, my ability to go at things and study, including materials that were not interesting to me, such as the two years of Latin I had to take, which I didn't enjoy, but I passed the course. And I also had to have a year of Spanish. I passed that but it didn't interest me. And the high school also helped me learn what is after all perhaps the most fundamental thing in learning: the ability to learn by myself, which is what they call homework. But they might better introduce it to students not by saying, "Now, I'm going to give you some homework." Everybody said, "Oh, [grumbling sounds]." Instead they should say, "I'm going to teach you the most important thing: how you study by yourself when you're all finished with school." All of American history, which I'm deeply, deeply interested in, I've learned since I left college--that kind of thing. And it introduced me to the richness of poetry, which I mentioned in the first tape. And also I recall certain assignments--the reading of some novels, which was new to me. I remember I read A Tale of Two Cities, and we had some Shakespeare, I think, and some Emerson essays. Certainly A Tale of Two Cities was something that gripped me, and since I hadn't been able to read novels, it was great.

And high school told me something about my, let's say, innate abilities, or interests. For instance, I could handle algebra but I just couldn't comprehend geometry, elementary

geometry; the thing was so difficult for me. I enjoyed a course in civics that we had, which was an aspect of social studies. Today it would be an aspect of social studies. But I remember I had an elementary course in biology and one in chemistry--no lab work, because they didn't have labs--and I don't think either course left any kind of residue whatsoever. I remember the word paramecium, and I remember drawing it, but nothing stuck at all.

And during this period my athletic interests continued all the time, but with some specific concentration on some things like tennis, which I love very much. And in this period boxing under a pro started when I was about seventeen, which I mentioned last time.

GARDNER: What was the milieu at the school? What were the students like and so on?

MALTZ: The school? I would say that they were there from middle-class, lower-middle-class to poor [families], with quite a mixed ethnic group. I think, as high schools went, the standards were probably quite high. And I think it was a wholesome atmosphere.

GARDNER: Was there any sense of social consciousness at this point?

MALTZ: None. On my part?

GARDNER: On your part, or in general in the high school.

MALTZ: There was none in the high school that I can recall.

But I had, and I mentioned this in the last tape, already a strong pacifist conviction, which was nurtured after my reading about the war by this one book, which, during my senior year, I used to read at lunch hour, with its exposures of the imperialist nature of World War I and of the way in which the munitions makers made their own private deals to make money no matter who died. And that was, as I can recall, the only aspect of social philosophy that I had.

Now, I had skipped a grade in elementary school, and as a result I was going to graduate from high school in January '26. Since my high school grades were very good, I was sure that I would be admitted to college. (There wasn't the competition then to get into colleges that there is these days.) And I applied only to Columbia University. The idea of Columbia, Columbia College, was that I would combine living at the college with being within a subway ride of home. And I had won a scholarship on the basis of--what were they called? they weren't state boards. . . .

GARDNER: State regents.

MALTZ: State regents. I won a scholarship on that and then found a rejection letter from Columbia. I had gone up there to take a kind of an orientation exam (I think it was a plus-or-minus one, I'm not sure; I believe it was that) somewhere along the line after I had applied, and when I went up, I went up to see some official, dean--assistant dean or so on--

and he said, "Well, you failed this exam." And I was thrown into a heap; I hadn't applied to any other college. He said, "Well, your grades are so good, I'll give you another exam." And I took the other exam. I failed that also.

GARDNER: What was the exam?

MALTZ: It covered a lot of different subjects, and it covered things like, I don't know, I don't remember it well, but I seem to recall questions about an automobile, other kinds of questions. And I couldn't answer them. I don't think it was, let's say, nervousness, because if I had any tensions about exams--and I expect I did--they were never of a kind to make me unable to summon up what I really did know. But it was something about them. But then I went and saw him again, and he said, "Well, you did so well in high school and so well on your regents, we'll give you a try." So they admitted me. [laughter]

I remember that there were two things that hit me when I started college: one was the feeling of being overwhelmed by the load of work, which was of course a usual freshman feeling; and second was, how the hell was I going to work? I lived in a dormitory which I think--no, it couldn't have dated back to the original King's College, that's too long, but it was a very old one. And as I sat in my room at night, and in the next room adjacent there were a couple of guys talking, I heard every word as you can hear me. I

don't know whether there were earplugs then. I didn't think of them. And then in the morning, if my alarm clock was set for seven, alarms started to go off beginning at a quarter to six or half past five--guys who maybe waited on table or did other things. Every ten minutes the alarms were going off all around; you could hear every one of them. And I thought, Jesus, you know, how am I going to survive this?

Well, I was going every day to the hospital to see my father. I spoke about the amputation of his legs. And then I guess fortunately for me at that moment, I got mononucleosis, which at that time was not a defined disease. But I had to drop out of school because of physical weakness. And I and, as a matter of fact, my brother got it at the same time and we went through batteries of examinations. They thought maybe we had tuberculosis of the glands, because of the swollen glands involved, decided not, and then we just rested as we had to. Time passed and we very slowly began to get well, because we didn't stay in bed; we would have gotten well more quickly if they had known about it as they do today.

GARDNER: When would this have been, your freshman year?

MALTZ: This was my freshman year. I had to drop out after about a month of school.

GARDNER: That soon?

MALTZ: Yes. And it came, I'm sure, from being around the

hospital. It's a disease that doctors and nurses get more than anybody else.

Oh, I think another thing that hit me already in the little bit that I was in college was the sense that the other students knew so much more than I did because they had been reading through their high school years and earlier. But also [there was] a determination that I was going to come back and going to work, that's all, to make it.

GARDNER: Well, during the time that you were sick did you try to make up any of those deficiencies and lie in bed and read all those books that you hadn't read?

MALTZ: No, I think I began to read then. I'm quite sure I began to read, because I told you about a secondhand bookstore where there was an elderly black woman with whom I made friends, and she was so sweet. I must have been getting books from her. At that time, being already in college, my mother wouldn't have said, "Don't read," so I presume that that was the time in which I began to read and try to catch up. And knowing by this time the name of Dickens and other such writers, I would seek their books. And to what extent I read contemporary literature then. . . . I imagine that was when I read--you know, Sinclair Lewis was a best-seller at that time; I would have read things like that. And I do remember sometime along in there, it was probably at this time, that there was a discovery of secondhand-book-

stores in general. Perhaps the bookstore of this woman was the first. I remember being down on lower Tenth Street and Fifth Avenue, around there, in that area where there were secondhand bookshops, and I probably started to get some. And somewhere in here (perhaps it was not as early as this) I discovered the Modern Library and had its roll of names and books to get. So I began reading.

Now, that summer my father took a house in the Catskill Mountains town of Monticello because he needed a great deal of recuperation still. He had been six months in the hospital. I went up there with him, with my mother and a nurse, and I divided my time between hours of exercise and hours of reading. I remember reading Dickens and Chekhov and de Maupassant and Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw and Andreyev, and reading poetry; I remember particularly Bram Stoker's--was it Dracula?

GARDNER: Dracula, right.

MALTZ: Because I remember reading it in the daytime and getting scared, so damn scared I couldn't continue with it. What's the one with vampires? Is that Dracula?

GARDNER: Yes.

MALTZ: I never finished the damn thing, and I never went to any of the films. I don't like that kind of film, I don't like that kind of story. But I remember I could feel chills down my back. [laughter] I was looking around for vampires.

GARDNER: And bats.

MALTZ: Yes, that was the effect of the book, powerful effect.

And naturally a thread throughout this long summer of about four months. . . .[sound interference--tape recorder turned off] And of course, during the whole summer there was a psychological problem with both my father and my mother over what had happened to him: the time when he got his first set of prostheses, which then were very primitive compared to what they have now, and trying to learn to walk on them--a question of waddling from side to side with what they had at that time, an extremely noticeable thing--and some of the psychological problems attendant to it. However, by fall he went back to the family home in Brooklyn and I believe at that time began already to start to engage in business again and, as a matter of fact, had been doing some, in terms of carrying on things, even while in his hospital bed.

My first year of college, then, really was from October '26 to June '27. And fortunately, in the interim a new dormitory had been built at Columbia where the walls were thick enough so that you wouldn't hear anybody in an adjacent room. I was fortunate enough to have a room in it, and that was fine. I came back psychologically geared for the burden of work that I got, everyone else got, and I had as my ever-present friend a dictionary. I don't know how it was, say, when you went to college, but I don't think there was a page that I

turned over in which there wasn't a word that I didn't know through lack of reading. And so I kept looking up words and after a while, of course, learning them.

GARDNER: You just mentioned your ever-present friend the dictionary. One thing you haven't talked about--and this may be on the level of personal and not really interesting--is the subject of friends, people you were close to in high school, and now starting off college. Did you have a circle of friends?

MALTZ: Yes, I had really the same friends with a few new additions all through elementary and high school because the same boys I grew up with went to the same high school. I advanced about a year beyond them as we went on but would see them, and when we came back from classes we just continued our same games. Except that I knew a fellow who moved to our street when I was about ten or twelve or so, and then when I went in for playing tennis, it was with him rather than the others. But the various sports and the handball and touch football and so on continued with the same group of guys. There was one new friend that I remember making in Columbia who didn't live in my area, but who went on to college with me, and I'll speak about him. I had made some friends in camp, also, whom I saw in the winter upon occasion--not too often, but they were very good friends.

GARDNER: So there was more than your dictionary.

MALTZ: Oh, yes. When I got to college, of course, I was eager to make friends and did make friends, and I'll speak of this.

The most important course in the first year at Columbia at that time was a course called Contemporary Civilization, which was five hours of classes a week with a considerable amount of reading and some very rich reading. For someone like myself, it just opened windows on areas of life and history that were to me marvelous. And I think maybe for the first time in a profound way I got caught by the excitement of learning, just learning things that you hadn't known about that were interesting and were revealing. I remember sometimes when I'd go back--I suppose I'd go back to my family home, I'd say, about once a month--and I would just talk and talk and talk to my parents about these things about which they knew nothing but which they found interesting and which I found so profoundly interesting. I believe that I had to take another entire year (maybe it was only a semester) of Spanish and ended up able to read, with a dictionary, a [Vicente] Blasco Ibáñez novel, but not able to talk at all, which was the wrong way to teach Spanish. I remember I took a course in trigonometry and that was one of the few math courses I enjoyed and was able to do well. I had a brilliant teacher who made his lessons a constant series of witticisms, absolutely brilliant. But nothing remained of it for me; I've

forgotten everything about it. I never used it in my life. And I have wondered, in terms of theories of education, as to the value of something like that or the value of the two years of Latin that I took. I know there's the claim that if you know Latin you understand the roots of a great deal of the English words, but it seems to me if I put those two years in on studying Fowler's English Usage or other such things in English, that I would have gotten further ahead than by taking Latin. But I don't know. . . . One would have to speak to educators at the source.

GARDNER: Well, they don't emphasize Latin a great deal anymore, but they don't seem to emphasize English anymore to a great extent.

MALTZ: Well, the fact of what is not emphasized today would not make me conclude that I was right, because they don't teach geography today and they should. They have apparently guys in law school here--an attorney was telling me recently, an attorney who taught in law school here, that, let alone teaching his students law, that he had to teach them how to write a business letter so that they carried an idea through from A to Z in a letter.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: Now, this is no system of education, if that's what you have with the men in law school. I understand today there are young teachers of English in universities who don't write well, who don't write proper English.

GARDNER: It's true.

MALTZ: Well, the system has gone haywire. If you can't communicate, where are you? So that I can understand now.

In the second half of my freshman year, there was an obligatory course in philosophy, and I was fortunate enough to have an absolutely marvelous instructor. His name was Irwin Edman, a name that you might know; if you don't, a slightly older generation of men would know it. Anyone would know it because he published some books. One was a best-seller, as a matter of fact, on philosophy, a popularization. He was one of the most gifted talkers I've ever known. Have you read any of [George] Santayana?

GARDNER: Yes.

MALTZ: You know his really eloquent prose, if you agree with me about it. Irwin Edman talked like that. He got up before a class and he talked with such beauty, with such grace of phraseology, with such felicitousness, that it was like listening to music, but it was full of ideas. His summation in a given hour of what one dialogue of Plato consisted of and the philosophy of Plato behind Aristotle, something like that, was just incredible. Ah, if I only had had a tape recorder at that time. And indeed, if his lectures had ever been tape recorded. . . . Because I think I've never known anyone else like that. I've never known anyone else like that, and I've had some splendid teachers in my life.

It was not just his teaching, of course, but something about the materials, for reasons I may not wholly understand now, that hooked me. I believe probably that I was searching for some truths about life, searching for some sort of intellectual foundation in an unconscious way, not in a conscious way. And I felt as though I'd, let's say, come to a well and I was thirsty, and all I had to do was drink. How much it meant to me is exemplified in an interesting way.

It had been my dream that when I got to college I would make the tennis team and the swimming team. There was no swim team at my high school. There was a tennis team, and I won't go into what happened there, where I didn't make that team. But I made my freshman tennis team and played a doubles match by the time I finished my second exam in this course in philosophy. I had gotten an A on the first exam. He gave an exam each month. In the second exam, as he went down the aisle giving out the papers, Professor Edman said, "You didn't do so well on this exam, Mr. Maltz," and I looked at it and I had a B. I had an A on the first one. And I stopped tennis. I don't mean I stopped playing, but I got off the team because of the amount of hours that you needed for practice. I knew that I had spent less time reading philosophy; I just hadn't had the time, what with the other courses as well. And that was an example of [snaps fingers] an abrupt change. I didn't have to think about it.

I didn't have to argue with myself. I didn't have any debate. I just quit. I wanted philosophy. It's just fascinating to me.

By the way, Irwin Edman was a small man, oh, probably about five-[foot]-four, and an albino. His eyes--I don't know whether this is also characteristic of albinos--his eyes moved a little bit. His pupils were not static, they kind of had a little vibration, as it were. Well, maybe that was some eye condition that he had. And he had this white hair--no, kind of reddish hair, it was whitish hair--white face, red eyelids, as I recall. Not a very prepossessing-looking man until you listened to him for five minutes and then he was. [laughter] And [he was] always a very, very popular teacher because he was so damned good. He was a close friend of Santayana's, by the way. And oh, it was during the first semester (this was the second semester) that I stopped that sort of neurotic side play of my interest in studies. I stopped the boxing. I used to keep going downtown from Columbia about twice a week to this little gym where pro fighters were being trained, you know, and I didn't belong there really, of course.

GARDNER: Did you just work out there? You sparred and so on?

MALTZ: Yes, and I was being trained. I was being trained for the Golden Gloves that I was going to start, see. But one day a curious little thing happened which resulted in my having kind of a semiconcussion almost, and I quit at that

point--which was about time. [laughter] I was very eager at that time also to join a fraternity, and I did; the high point for me was being accepted, and after that it was all downhill. By the spring of that year I was no longer going, and the next year I severed from it.

GARDNER: What was the fraternity?

MALTZ: It was called ZBT [Zeta Beta Tau]. Now, I made some friends at college in the first year [who] were my friends throughout. One was a marvelous boy really. He came into college at about sixteen as a prodigy, and he had the celebrated name of Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Jr. He was the grandson of the baseball commissioner, an Indiana boy whose father was a judge. And between his first year and his second he grew about a foot. I guess he was about a little taller than I am when he first came in; when he came back, turned up the next year, he was over six feet, with pipestem arms and legs but very strong. And he and I just hit it off in the most marvelous way. We used to talk together and eat together and visit each other's rooms and so on. He may have come in a semester after I [did], I don't remember anymore, and we remained friends for years and corresponded together. He had to leave college in his senior year because he got TB, and he was in a sanatorium for part of the time out in California. When I came out here at a certain point I saw him. We then corresponded and so on, but he died at

an early age. He died when he was about forty.

I remember being appalled by something he did in his sophomore year. He needed money. His father, in spite of being a judge, didn't have very much, or maybe he was an ex-judge by that time. As a matter of fact, he had run for governor of Indiana, and Ken left college at a certain point, I don't remember whether it was his first year or his second year, to help his father's campaign. His father lost. It was a campaign to get the Democratic nomination, I think, or Republican nomination, I no longer recall. Ken came back and told me that in the convention hall there had been an interruption for about an hour in the convention while backers of his father's opponent went around and handed out, I think it was, \$100 bills to delegates. And then they voted. Just openly! [laughter] But he needed money and went in for poker playing. That was Prohibition time. He and the group who were playing with him used to start playing on a Friday night, and they would play straight through till Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon. And I remember I'd go around and watch them for maybe five, ten minutes on Friday night--never had an interest in cards--and then I would come and watch them for five minutes on Saturday and then on Sunday. And what Ken had over the other guys was that he could drink and stay sober, and he would win money at this, on which he lived. Whether or not that had anything to do with the tuberculosis

that developed, that kind of life, I don't know. But that was so of him.

Another friend I had was one I had met in high school. Jules Eisenbud went to college with me and in subsequent years became an analyst. He is an analyst in Denver and has been known, both with approval and with disapproval, for his great interest in extrasensory perception. And he's written on that. He gave a lecture here on that, as a matter of fact, in the sixties. I came and attended it. I remember that, oh, very early after he got out of college and came back from Vienna where he had gone for his studies, I think with Freud, I'm not sure, he manifested that interest.

My closest friend, and the man who became my roommate in the second year, was Beryl Levy. He was a Brooklyn boy.

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MALTZ: Beryl Levy's background, or way of life before college, had been the very opposite of mine: he never took any exercise of any sort, had none of my interest in sports, but loved the dictionary. And my first impression of him was watching him in class, I think it was Contemporary Civilization; he asked some questions, and I heard words used that I had never heard before in my life. [laughter] And I felt very ignorant and thought how brilliant this guy is. He was an extremely lively, ebullient man, a very bright mind, had great interests in all sorts of things intellectual. [He was a] great devotee of Gilbert and Sullivan, whose songs he could sing at the drop of a hat. And as the year passed we came to see more and more of each other and found each other just the company we wanted, so that we agreed to room together in our second year. He was, for that phase of my life and for several years thereafter, excellent company and marvelously stimulating. He too was majoring in philosophy, so that we had this common interest and a number of classes together.

Another friend was Milton Katims, who has been the conductor of the Seattle Symphony for a good many years and plays the viola. At that time he was a violinist who played a lot. And since he lived off campus, he used to use my room in between

classes when he had no place to go, used it for study and so on. But [he is] a man I haven't seen since college.

Still another was Ben Maddow, who is a screenwriter, and at that time he was a poet very highly thought of by Mark Van Doren, who tried to get a book of poetry of his published. I never understood his poetry, but Mark did apparently and liked it, and I would trust Mark's taste more than my own.

GARDNER: What sort of poetry was it that you didn't understand it?

MALTZ: Well, let's say I don't understand Ezra Pound's poetry.

GARDNER: It was in that sort of. . . ?

MALTZ: Perhaps, I don't know. Or the poetry of--who was the man that died at sea, the poet that either fell overboard or [was] a suicide? He was a well-known contemporary poet, the name is just not in my mind. Well, he was a name at that time in a way that Pound was not yet, and it was in that vein. But side by side with Edna St. Vincent Millay then, who was quite a name at that time, there was this whole other strain of poetry which I didn't understand then; I don't understand now.

GARDNER: You mean Eliot?

MALTZ: No, not Eliot. Eliot is one I understand. I forget the name. But there is a good deal of modern poetry that I find no reward in reading because I don't understand it. And [Maddow] is no longer my friend, by the way, because of his

testimony before the committee, [House] Un-American [Activities] Committee. Among the other men I knew were Arthur Krim and Robert Blumofe, two men who became attorneys and then, with another man, took over United Artists around 1950, Krim becoming the head and Robert Blumofe one of the vice-presidents. I don't remember anymore the name of the law school senior who happened to be next door to me at the time I was preparing for final exams in the spring of my first year. Because I knocked on his door one night and I said, "Would you mind telling me who this author 'Ibid' is?" I had seen "Ibid" in the footnotes for a year, and I didn't know. [laughter]

GARDNER: He certainly was a versatile and prolific author.

MALTZ: Certainly was a prolific author. [laughter] That spring semester the way I did in my exams established the pattern of my years in college in terms of studies, because I was an A student and remained that, and as I went on I had the confidence that in any subject I chose which I enjoyed, I would remain that. And for me it was a good and I would say healthy feeling (of course, there were other feelings of inadequacy) and was part of the total excitement I felt and continued to feel at this marvelous process of learning, which was so very exciting. That year, by the end of the year I think the question began that would loom more and more in my life, which was: What am I going to do with my life? I had not entered college with any kind of profession

in mind. My father had wanted me to be an attorney, and I don't know whether it was just for unconscious opposition to him, I made up my mind that I wasn't going to be an attorney. Maybe there were other factors in that that I no longer recall.

GARDNER: What were your brothers doing?

MALTZ: Well, my brothers were both by that time in business. [tape recorder turned off] My brothers were in business with my father. Well, that summer my father again went to Monticello, and again it was with a nurse he still needed, and my grandmother, whom I didn't mention before, was there as well. From time to time my brothers or an aunt would come up for a weekend, or something like that. And I spent the summer much as I had the previous one, only now my reading started to include dialogues of Plato, which I had been introduced to, and Aristotle's Poetics and things like that, as well as novels and other materials. However, I guess I can say now that my concentration on philosophy in college made my acquaintanceship with other subjects very haphazard. In some ways I think it was wrong for me to concentrate that much, but I did it and it also paid off in certain benefits, I think, real benefits. But aside from the two obligatory courses in English that I took, one in my first year which was English--well, no, English composition, which was valuable, and at the end of which the instructor said to the class,

gratuitously, "No one in this class will ever become a writer."
[laughter] I don't know why he said that. Maybe he at that moment was submitting material to magazines or had published something and felt very smug about it. I always happened to remember the remark, even though at that time I had no intention of writing. And [aside from] another course which was very important to me because of what came out of it (which I'll mention), I took no more courses in literature. So there are books which I would have read along the way if I had which I've still not read. I took no courses in history, I took no courses in economics. I once started a course in economics and found the instructor boring and, under the latitude of the Columbia system at that time, after three sessions I was allowed to drop out. I dropped out and took another course in philosophy.

GARDNER: You were able to take nothing but philosophy?

MALTZ: No, there were a few other courses. If I'd been aiming for medicine I would have had to take an allotted amount of scientific courses. And I had to have a year of science, but since I was not interested in science, you could take a couple of easy courses--one was astronomy and the other was geology--and that was my science. That was fine for me because it was more literary than anything else. After I'd finished my year of Spanish and a course in hygiene that we had to take, and I mentioned trigonometry, there were, as

I recall, not many things that I had to take. I voluntarily took one semester of French once, my own decision, and I voluntarily tried a course in chemistry once. I'll skip at this point because it comes into this.

In my agitation over what I was going to do, I thought, well, maybe I want to become a physician--a good profession, romantic, you help people. I said, but I've got to have some science, I've got to know I can do science. And I think in my junior year I took a course in chemistry. And then I started to learn the theory of the thing and found out later on the first exam they didn't want the theory; they wanted the formula, and I hadn't learned the formula. Well, what really told me where I stood with chemistry was going to lab. We had three hours of laboratory on Saturday, and by the time I got my test tubes and Bunsen burner and other little things out of my locker, the other students around me had finished their first experiment. Every Saturday (and this still continues in my life, by the way) I would grab a hot test tube, and I would come away with burns and have a bandage on my hand for the weekend with burns. I was always grabbing the goddamn hot test tube. [laughter] And then somewhere along the way, after about six weeks or so, we had to do an experiment with some potassium permanganate, and I remember putting it in the solution; it was a perfectly beautiful, purple color, and the sun was shining, and I held it up to one of the

windows and shook it, and the bubbles were there. An assistant instructor was passing at the time, and I said, "Look!" And he looked up and said, "Yes," and he gave me the formula and went on. I said, "Oh, this is not for me. I'm interested in the beauty of this." [laughter] So I quit the course, as I could at that time, because of my grades and standing, without even getting a bad mark or a "fail" on it. And that was the end of my trying to be a doctor.

But for those in the liberal arts at that time, or humanities (whatever they called it), if you maintained I think a B average or a B+ average, something like that, after you had completed a small number of these obligatory courses, you could take whatever you chose. And I just took course after course in philosophy. In my second year there was a very intensive five-hour-a-week course in the history of philosophy, one year, with a lot of reading. I also remember a very important course to me which was one in comparative religions. Because whatever doubts and conflicts I still had about the question of God and did God create the universe and so on--you must remember that was, after all, fifty years ago when the hand of religion was much more over people than it is today--this course was one in which I could see, through the study of comparative religions, how different things thought to be sacrosanct, handed down from on high were related to the growth of one culture into another. And it just ended,

for me, all questions of deity and religion--not the ethics of religion, of course, which are universal; the Sermon on the Mount is as valid today as any other equal doctrine. All religions have them.

But in, I think, the second semester of the second year, or the first semester, probably the first semester, I had a course with John Erskine in Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser (Spenser is the poet, is he not?), and a few others. And I wouldn't have taken it if it hadn't been obligatory.

Does the name Erskine mean anything to you?

GARDNER: I know the name.

MALTZ: Yes. Well, he was a really Renaissance man. He was professor of English at Columbia. He was the head of the Juilliard School of Music, which was attached to Columbia. He was a concert pianist, and he was a very successful writer of light, historical romances. And he was a marvelous teacher. We had to read the Faerie Queene, Spenser's; I read it, and although in some respects it was dull, in other respects I was enchanted by the man's quality of poetry. It was extraordinary. We had to write an essay about it. I came in to class a week or two later, and Erskine said he wanted to read one essay. And he read mine. I was flabbergasted by his reading of it and his praise of it, and out of this business of what am I going to do in life, I went up to him afterwards, stammering, and asked him if he thought I could

be a writer. And he said, "If you have something to say, yes." And that put the thought in my mind, gee, maybe I could become a writer. That seemed to be a most marvelous profession. And I said, all right, I'll see if I have anything to say. But as a result of that I did the next year take a course in short-story writing and begin to think of that. (Although, as I say, in my junior year I also took a course in chemistry to see if I could be a doctor.)

GARDNER: Had you essayed any short stories before you took the course?

MALTZ: No, I had not done anything. I had not tried any kind of writing that I can recall. . . .

GARDNER: Other than what was required in classes.

MALTZ: . . . other than what was required in school. I had had no bug for writing before that. But that bug grew very powerfully from that time on. Because in my senior year while carrying on my studies, I wrote a novel at the same time, a fantasy novel as a matter of fact, kind of a science fiction novel. I did take in my second year--I think because a friend suggested it, another friend, a man who became a rather distinguished reporter, Harold Isaacs, who is now teaching at MIT, I think--I took a course in the history of something I think like the theory of government. And yet that wasn't quite the name of it. [It was] with a mar-

velous teacher, Peter Odegard, who wrote books and subsequently became head of Reed College for a while and then head of the Department of Political Science at Berkeley. And now he was a friend at college, Peter Odegard became a friend, and as a matter of fact, when he left Columbia in our senior year, Harold Isaacs and I hitchhiked up to Williams College and spent a weekend with him and his family. In succeeding years when he was at Ohio State and I was passing through the country, I would stop at Ohio State and see him and his wife and kid. Then he stopped on his way to Reed College to see me in Los Angeles. And we were friends. He was a very, very stimulating man, a marvelous teacher. I suppose you've had the same experiences I've had. Teachers, good teachers are just golden, absolutely golden; they're so marvelous in what they can do for a human being. And they're not honored enough, really. I have a friend in East Germany who is not only a professor but he's "professor doctor." Apparently over there and in Europe in general, certain countries of Europe, there is a kind of respect for a professor, which not all professors deserve, I'm sure. But a good teacher remains with you forever in what they contribute to your soul, you know, to your mind.

I took this course in extension, and I got no credit for it. It was just extra work and extra reading, but that was exciting, that thing. And in that year, having given up

tennis, I went into wrestling, and not for the team because I never would spend the time ever again trying to get on a team. But it was something. It was a sport I liked. I don't know if you know anything about it, but it is very scientific. I'm not talking about the crap, you know, the vaudeville acts the professionals do, but really scientific wrestling is just marvelous. And I used to watch the matches; that one indulgence I gave myself on Saturday afternoons in winter. Probably about fifty of us in the whole college watched it. Nobody else was interested.

I don't know what I did that summer; I'm trying to think and that's where my notes just about stopped. The summer of my second year, I just don't remember; it's a blank. I don't remember whether I was up in Monticello again. But the third year introduced, in addition to whatever other courses I took--oh, I remember, it's the third year or fourth year--well, courses in philosophy, Aristotle, and Santayana. As a matter of fact, since I've just been talking about good teachers, I think I'll mention an example of a brilliant but bad teacher. I had I think in my senior year, or junior year it might have been, a single seminar where I was alone with the instructor. We met once a week and he gave me reading to do--a man called [Richard] McKeon, who went on to become, I think, dean of students at Chicago, probably now retired, very respected, with a fantastic knowledge of his field and

fantastic mental recall. And his field was Greek and medieval philosophy. I'd go in there having studied, let's say, some of Aristotle's Logic during the week that was tough going for me, and I would come in with some questions for him and certain observations. And although I didn't understand it at first and came to understand it later, he would take my propositions (and he wasn't just being, let's say, Socratic in upsetting my apple cart to make me think more), but he would beat down what I said by opposite propositions from Aquinas, and send me off to study some Aquinas. I'd study Aquinas during the week and that was tough going too, and I'd come in with this Aquinas thing and then he'd beat me back with Aristotle. After a while I realized that he was not interested in teaching me, he was interested in showing off. And even though I was just an audience of one, he was enjoying being a smart aleck. He didn't give a damn what I learned or what I didn't learn. Now, of course it was a rigorous time in the sense that I had to apply myself with every nerve fiber, but it was in no sense a happy learning time or a creative learning time. It was just getting hit on the head with an intellectual club once a week, and that's the opposite of an Odegard or an Irwin Edman. In a year, half a semester later or something like that, I also had a one-man semester with Irwin Edman on Santayana, and it was a very different kind of experience.

GARDNER: But what sort of philosophy was taking shape within you at this point?

MALTZ: Personal philosophy?

GARDNER: Right. Were you drawing from what you were learning? Of course it was very early on for anyone to be carving out a personal philosophy, but still, was there a direction in your attitude?

MALTZ: No, I don't think there was a direction in my attitude, and for certain reasons. There were things that happened to me as a result of it and not a direction in my own philosophical attitude. Of course a great deal of philosophy and history of philosophy is occupied with the problem of knowledge, epistemology--do you know reality or do you not?--and each philosopher in turn grappled with it for centuries. So what you did was to study their grapplings with this problem. Do we know reality or don't we? Or maybe you're dreaming. And I'm going to tell you later, when I come to the question of my reading of Marxism, why I was so impressed with Engels because of what he said in a footnote about the question of epistemology. But as a result it isn't as though you were reading a contemporary work which, facing the world in which we exist--let's say Sartre, who was saying, "What can we believe in?"--most of philosophy was not occupied with that, and therefore I was not consciously grappling and saying, "Yes, I believe with him in this, or I differ with him in that," and thereby formu-

lating my own philosophy.

Now, along the way, of course, I remember I got certain lasting attitudes towards aesthetics through reading Aristotle's Poetics, because I think his Poetics are basically sound dramaturgically today. And I certainly got out of his Ethics that sense of the mean, which I've retained--the mean between opposites. What I think philosophy did do for me very much was to call upon me to try and use whatever intellect I had in a stern way, stay with the material and try to think it through. And if I didn't understand something, to reread it a second a third or fourth time, and to grapple with the concepts. That was good training for me. In a sense, if you march a soldier sixteen or twenty miles a day, you're helping him survive. And also it emphasized logic for me. Whatever other talents I lack, I have been unable to use characters and events illogically. In film work that I've done, there's motivation for the characters and there's logic in the events. I don't accept the way in which people leap from one thing to another without having motivation, the kind of comment I made about High Noon. This kind of thing bothers me about any material, and certainly if I'm working on it, and this affected all my writing. [It] probably affected an attitude I developed early while I was still doing playwriting, which was the decision that if I came upon something that I was working on, preparing, where I

didn't know what the facts were, instead of just making it up out of my head, which other writers do, I would, say, go to the facts, find out the material. Usually if you find out the real material, you invent something better than you would have invented if you had just made it up out of your head. You don't have to be afraid of facts. They're not your enemy; they can be your aid. I think that came out of the study in philosophy as well. I think it also stimulated very much my search for moral values in my life and in the society in which I exist. So that it was rather attitudes, rather than the full-blown philosophy, which I think was created.

GARDNER: Let me ask one other question somewhat along that line. The year we're talking about now is '28-29. There would have been a presidential election in 1928. Were you either aware or involved politically in any way?

MALTZ: I was not involved politically, but I do remember that my roommate said, "Hey, let's have a lark. We'll take the night train down to Washington, and we'll watch Hoover being inaugurated." And so we did. I remember how sleepy I was through the inauguration because I hadn't slept all night--the noisy train of people going down--and I was half a mile away from the steps of the Capitol. We were there but that was all it was. However, I don't know whether it was then or the next year, more likely the next year, that somewhere by accident, maybe someplace where I would pass, I would

occasionally run across a copy of I think at that time it was called the Masses (and then later the New Masses). Well, it was the Masses then. And this was like getting my hands on a curiously fascinating object from another world, and I remember reading those copies with interest. It didn't stimulate me to do anything or go to a meeting; as a matter of fact, during this period, I recall, in kind of a snobbish way I gave up reading newspapers altogether. When I was in high school I had read the papers at home, and I think at the beginning I began to read the New York Times, but I know there was a period, and probably it began by about my sophomore year at least, that I just didn't read the newspapers. I was reading philosophy--what did I need the newspapers for? It was that kind of attitude.

Oh, I've forgotten that one thing I did have all through college was a little wind-up Victrola, where every time you played a record, you had to wind it. And I had about, I don't know, ten records, twenty records, and as I recall they were mostly Bach and Beethoven. I would play the same things over and over again with great satisfaction. Why I didn't get more records, I don't know, because I think I could have--financially I could have--I just didn't. I guess the idea of owning more. . . . In fact, I didn't know anybody else who had any music in his room. I met a student who was a friend of mine there, his father was a bandleader, Edwin

Franco Goldman. His name was the same, junior. He was a friend of mine. I'd forgotten about him. He went on to conduct his father's band until recently, or I think he's still conducting in New York. He was a guy who impressed me because he would speak about music in ways that I had never heard in my life.

Now, in my third year I began the course called Honors. I think it was from this course that the Great Books came into existence, because Mortimer Adler was intimately involved with the Great Books, and he was involved with teaching Honors. My two instructors I had basically for two years who were both present in the Honors course were Adler and Mark Van Doren. We sat at a table like this in a room smaller than this, and there were probably about twelve or fifteen students, and each week we had another great book that we read. We talked about it, and it was very, very stimulating, very, very exciting. It was very interesting to have a man as brilliant as Adler was and as valuable and as deliberately show-offy, against a man of far greater simplicity and far more interest, I think, in really getting students to learn. Much quieter, who spoke not one-tenth of the words of Adler in a given evening, but when he spoke I listened to him more closely--and that was Mark Van Doren, whom I came to treasure, a marvelous teacher. I think once or twice when Mark might have been ill or occupied, his older brother Carl came.

Subsequently I taught at a summer school some years later where Carl was and came to know him. And he was the same kind. These are just great men, great human beings. Mortimer Adler (as I discovered later, I didn't know at the time) was capable of great phoniness. Not that he wasn't, you know really stimulating and an excellent teacher and a great deal of good things that he did, but when we had the session on Freud I asked him later, because he conducted it mostly, I said, "Well, what I don't understand is why people change in analysis." And he said, "Well, as to that, I would have to explain it in mathematical terms that I know you can't understand." I accepted that because I knew that he knew some mathematics, and I didn't know any. But later when I was in analysis myself and learned why people change, I knew what crap this had been from him, you see. Now, Mark would never have said that. He would have said a simple, "I don't know."

Now, since--it's a leap, but I'll talk about Mark for the moment, if I may. He has an autobiography, which I read. As a matter of fact, about a year before he died, it was about a year or two, there was an article on him in Life magazine showing where he worked in his summer home. On a happy impulse, I wrote him a letter, in care of Life, I guess, or to a small town or to Columbia, to tell him how much he had meant to me as a student. And [I] got back a card from him

saying he remembered me, he had followed me over the years, and he was very glad to get my letter, and so on. I was pleased that I did write him since he was to die the next year, but just so a guy would hear from one of his students who did appreciate him. Do you remember what happened with his son?

GARDNER: Yes.

MALTZ: Well, this is something I would love to write as a drama. Really, it belongs on TV, but no TV station would do it because it could be exposing themselves. In his autobiography Mark says: And then came the time when Charles was invited to participate in the "Sixty-Four Thousand Dollar Question" on TV, and within a few weeks all of America was watching him. He made the name of egghead important (or however he phrased it). And thousands of letters came in from all over the country, and it was wonderfully exciting, and we all waited for these Monday nights or Tuesday nights, or whatever they were. And he goes on like that, and then he says: And then Charles married so-and-so and went off to Europe. He just completely omits what happened in terms of the fraud being discovered and the appearance of his son before a judge and all of that. And I said to myself, I can understand how Mark would have blotted it out because it was so painful to him, but how could the publishers let this go through? And then I thought, well, maybe they just

said, "It is too painful to him. We're not going to ask him to take it out. We're not going to ask him to put anything in that should be there. We'll just let it go through." And they did. And it's an absolutely unbelievable thing to read. If I were able to write it, I think I would do the tragedy--the tragedy of pride, of hubris, I guess--of a young man brought up in a household where a great many celebrated people came, just normally, and where he met Joseph Wood Krutch, and Wendell Willkie coming around, and authors and so on and so forth, and [he] aspired to be celebrated like them. And when this thing came up with the "Sixty-four Thousand Dollar Question," and the moment came of saying, "Will I or will I not," that desire, I think not so much for money, but to be celebrated and to be important was something that he had had burning in him from the time he was a kid, much more than his father would have when he was just the son of a country physician, of a midwestern physician. That's the way I would write it. Maybe the surmise isn't true, but I think it is. And then the parents' reaction, these sensitive parents, to the fact that their son had done something as gross as that, to cheat a whole nation. . . . What a tragedy, what a frightful tragedy.

Well, anyway, those two years in Honors were just great, marvelously stimulating. Of course [they were] in a sense superficial in that you only discussed one book for two hours

or two and a half hours of an evening, once a week; but [it was] opening a door and saying, "You can come back to it if you wish." And in the group were the brightest students around. You didn't want to miss any of the classes.

That summer I went to Europe with my oldest brother, Edward, a long, four months' trip in which we went to a lot of countries. And not knowing languages, we got only superficial [tape recorder turned off] impressions of countries--of course the museums, naturally, and what the eye could take in.

GARDNER: How many countries did you go to?

MALTZ: Oh my, we went first to France, and then Holland.

We met some girls on the boat going over, and they were the reason we went to Holland at that time. They invited us because they were members of Moral Re-Armament [MRA], which was at work then, and they hoped to get some recruits and were having some sort of a meeting there. So we joined the group in Scheveningen and were around there. We made no hay with the girls, pulled out of the Buchman movement within a couple of days, but found Holland an enchanting place. We didn't see much of France, a little bit, stopped off, I remember, in some wine country town, Bordeaux maybe. And we went to Spain, where we were in Madrid and Barcelona. I remember there getting some sense of the poverty that I had not seen before, because in certain areas of Spain at that time people were living in caves. Now actually, cave life can be pretty

good, I think, because they can keep people dry and be cool in the summer and warm in the winter. But I didn't know that and it seemed bad. But walking around Madrid at night at that time, you'd see beggars asleep in doorways at night, and one had a sense of something there, but I didn't think in social terms beyond that. As a matter of fact, I thought so little in social terms that when we were in Germany and in the town of Heidelberg, we had an encounter with some anti-Semitic students, probably Nazi students who were saying things and making insulting gestures as we were going to our little pension. And they were stopped by a cop. But we didn't know what this stood for. And though it was '29, we didn't know about Brownshirts or anything about it. I remember we met a family, an English-speaking family in Austria, and they didn't speak about this kind of thing at all. We were in Italy and I knew that there was Mussolini in Italy. I knew that. But for us, going to Italy was the same as going to France. I guess those were about the countries we were in. It was essentially a tour of museums, to an extent--as I said, the superficial impressions of what your eye can gather.

When we came back and I went into school, of course the Crash happened in the end of October, as I recall, '29. And while it didn't affect me in any immediate way, it started to affect friends who left school. I mentioned particular friends, but of course I knew a great many more men than that.

I know that a number I knew had to drop out of college because their fathers went flat busted, and paying tuition was out of the question; the fellows had to go out and get work. I don't know whether or not I started to read the newspaper then. I don't know as I did. The full impact of the Depression, in terms of unemployment and the apple sellers and so on, didn't begin immediately in '29, as I recall. It came a little more gradually than that. And so one didn't begin to see the apple sellers on the streets and Hoovervilles springing up along Riverside Drive, where I used to walk, until later. Otherwise I was little affected by it immediately. And so for me I think the year was once again a year of intensive study and a year of making Phi Beta Kappa, which was a big aim of mine, a hope. Oh, but I've forgotten, I left out something from my junior year. In the junior year I took a course in short-story writing.

GARDNER: You mentioned that before.

MALTZ: It had a limited value only, because the man who taught it had a theory about writing, which he carried out himself, which is that you should only write about what people do and what they say and not what they think. Why he wanted to leave out what they think, I don't know, but he insisted that that was how we write.

GARDNER: Who was it?

MALTZ: I forget his name.

GARDNER: No one. . . ?

MALTZ: He had published some novels, [but he] doesn't remain as a well-known writer--a pleasant man. And it was a certain exercise in descriptive powers, which is all right but not really in short-story writing. And I don't remember anything about the short stories I wrote. I never kept any of this stuff, unfortunately.

My senior year I took a course in playwriting from a man who had won a Pulitzer Prize, Hatcher Hughes, and it was a useful course.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 5, 1976

GARDNER: You were talking about playwriting.

MALTZ: I'm talking about playwriting. I know that in my senior year--I don't think that it would have been earlier because I believe it was the first semester of senior year that I took this course--I wrote probably half a dozen one-act plays which I sent away to contests. I expect by that time I must have been buying a writers magazine, something like that, so I was trying for contests. I also wanted to write a three-act play about a personal subject, which I have forgotten to mention, which was important in my college years. I was dissuaded from writing it by Hatcher Hughes, because he said a current hit on Broadway called . . . oh, it was by Marvin Flavin, a prison play . . . I'll think of its name in a moment [The Criminal Code]. It was a very, very well-done play and really precluded another play on the same subject.

But my play had to do with my uncle, and this is something I've forgotten. In my freshman year an uncle of mine, an uncle by marriage, was arrested and charged with robbery--actually, the holdup of a truck with furs in it, an armed holdup. And [for] this crime, as charged under the laws of New York State at that time, he could receive from

fifteen to thirty years although it was a first arrest. He was a small, not too pleasant, not well-educated, very violent-tempered man who had been a shoe salesman. During the Prohibition period he became a small bootlegger, and I expect he earned a little more money being a bootlegger than he had as a shoe salesman. Just what his bootlegging activities were, whether he ran liquor or what he did, I never knew. But I judged by what came out in the course of this trial and what I heard later that he became involved in a scheme that someone had where they would be able to ship bootleg liquor as though it were paint or turpentine, which would make it easier for them to distribute. But in order to set up the plant that they needed to do this they needed cash, and this holdup was the result.

It was my impression--I attended the trial, and I did so really out of compassion for his wife, who was my aunt, who was a sweet (and I mentioned her in the first tape), somewhat retarded woman. It was my impression that this uncle--his name was Charles, I don't even remember his last name--probably was involved in receiving the stolen goods and in planning the robbery. I don't think he was in on the holdup. But what happened when detectives came to his home and wanted to enter his garage was that he tried to bluff them out of it by saying, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" and so on and so forth, and was very

insulting to them. And they said to themselves, "All right, you want to act like that. . ." and they hung the holdup rap on him as well. They just testified that he was one of the men in the car. That may not be true, but I got that strong impression out of the trial, out of what his wife said, and out of such other things.

During the course of the trial something that made me sympathetic to him was that I began to notice the behavior on the part of the defense attorney which I didn't understand. For instance, when my uncle was on the stand or when he was delivering his summation to the jury, he pointed to my uncle and he said, "Now look at that mug face. Could you ever forget a face like that?" And he was using this, as it were, to present the innocence of my uncle, but in fact it was casting an unpleasant light upon him. And in fact, he did not have a mug face; he didn't have a particularly handsome face, but it wasn't a face that one would say, "Oh, look at that thug." It wasn't that kind of a face at all. I said, "Why is he saying this?" Subsequently I was told--and this again is lost in the mist of time, but it is something I've remembered as believing it to be true--that the man behind the whole operation, and the one who had suggested the hold-up, was a well-to-do crook who lived on Riverside Drive, who never was the one to carry out any action, who never got in trouble, and, in this case, was apparently ready to have

these men go up to prison in order to save his own skin. This was my impression. Now, this may have been just a myth, but that was why the defense attorney was behaving in the way he did.

In any instance they were held guilty, and my uncle was given fifteen years and sent to Sing Sing. All through college and for years afterwards, about once a month I used to go visit him. And it was this story that I wanted to deal with in the play. Hatcher Hughes suggested that I now go into something else.

Going up to Sing Sing, as I did over the years, added a certain little dimension to my understanding of society. I remember the Saturday morning train (that wasn't the one I always took), but it was distinguished by the fact that women and children would be packing it. That was the day when kids were not in school, that was the day when working mothers might be able to go. And you'd see them come out of the poorer sections of New York--at that time not many blacks; they were the ethnic groupings of New York, the white ethnic groupings. At that time there was a rather advanced, progressive thinker in charge of Sing Sing, Warden Lawes. The waiting room at Sing Sing was a pleasant room; there were little open cubicles in which four people could sit for a visit. I would see how women would go into a restroom and come back, and it was noticeable that

they had taken off their corsets. And you would see a man in the course of a conversation with a woman lean over facing her as though to whisper something in her ear, but she might move her coat a little bit so that he could slip [his] hand behind the protection, the visible protection of her coat, in order to put his hand on her body. And there was tremendous pathos in that. My uncle was for a good deal of the time in what was called the old cell block, which was right along the Hudson River. And he said that the moment they came into the cells, from wherever they were outside, you had to wrap yourself in your blanket or else you would be stiff by morning from the damp. The damp water ran down the cell wall.

During those years, from time to time he would ask me to go on errands that might help him get out, and I would do that. Once I went up to Syracuse, New York, to find a man who worked in a certain plant, and at various times I hired various lawyers with sums that I saved from my own allowance. I might say that my father had turned completely against him, although he was supporting his wife and child, because at one point before this robbery, when my father was out of town, my uncle had had a meeting in his office, in my father's office. He had access to the office, being a member of the family; he could walk in and the secretaries knew him. But apparently he brought together some of his

henchmen and had a meeting there, and my father was outraged because, he said, he could have gotten him into trouble, and refused to have anything to do with him, and nobody else in the family saw him. So I just went on seeing him out of this sense of compassion. And so I spent some money on this lawyer and that lawyer (they never did anything), and, I remember, once went way the heck out in Brooklyn to see somebody and asked him some questions. And this man just looked at me with a stone face, and he said, "I don't know. I don't know nothin', don't know nothin'." And I turned around and went back the hour and a half. [laughter] It was that kind of thing. My uncle finally got out of prison around 1935, which means that he was in-- I guess he was let out after about nine years out of his fifteen-year sentence. And I let him have an automobile I had then. I think that was the last time I saw him. A few years later he died.

But in that last year of college I also wrote a novel. It was--oh, it's not important what it was about, a certain fantasy base, but one thing I remember and which gives some insight about myself: I had a very savage portrayal of a lynching, to express my horror at this. So it means that about that time, by that time in my life, I not only had a pacifist conviction about war, but I had deep hatred for that type of merciless behavior on the part of mostly white

southerners--not only white southerners--toward blacks.

GARDNER: Well, and judging from that and also from the theme of the prison play, there's a consciousness of injustice at this point.

MALTZ: Yes. By this time there's a real consciousness of injustice, and wherever I met injustice, wherever I saw it in my limited knowledge of society, I revolted against it just automatically, as though I were touching a hot stove. I'm sure that if I had had a more rounded college education, let's say if I had taken some history, if I had taken some other courses which would have opened the current world to me, I would have been much more advanced in this area. But since I was so locked into philosophy, I didn't. And during this year, the last year, and with my deep interest in playwriting and my growing interest in writing of all kinds, I got the idea, because I found out about it, of trying to go to the Yale School of Drama. And since at that time in my life my father could afford that, and since he was an indulgent man in the sense that he knew that I had always done well in school, and if I wanted to go on to something like that (although he would have preferred me to go into law), he was willing to take a ride on it. Maybe I could do something, because I hadn't disappointed them in other areas.

GARDNER: Is there anyone at this point who--forgive me for interrupting . . .

MALTZ: No, that's all right.

GARDNER: . . . who you could look on as a literary source or influence? I mean, by this time, obviously you were reading quite a bit, you were interested in playwriting--was there a playwright whose work affected you?

MALTZ: Well, I don't know yet. Oh, I would say by the third year, by the end of my third year in college, I not only was starting to go to theater when I could, but there was a period in spring after you took your exams and before the grades came through that you had to stick around. It was about a week, and I would go down every day to Broadway and see plays. I remember going to the Theatre Guild and seeing some wonderful plays. It was a great institution then. I remember seeing Pirandello's "Right You are If You Think So,"* with Edward Robinson playing the lawyer, a young lawyer I think he was, a notary--a marvelous performance on his part (even though he lied about me years later before the committee). And that was tremendously exciting to me, tremendously. I remember going with my friend Beryl Levy [to], I believe it was, Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra, which was about a five-hour play, and going out and having dinner in between. That was so enormously exciting. I don't know at what point various influences came in. I do know, for instance, that Strindberg, who was an important playwriting influence, I didn't learn about till I was in drama school. At what

* Right You Are If You Think You Are

point Andrejev, who was one of my important influences-- at what point I read him I don't remember; it may have been while I was still in college. There was a particular book, The Seven Who Were Hanged--do you know it at all?--that influenced me very greatly. I felt, gee, this is the way I would like to write. Another man who was an influence on me was Liam O'Flaherty, who has remained an important writer to me and I think a writer who should have gotten a Nobel Prize in light of other writers who have received the Nobel Prize. Galsworthy's short stories and plays were an influence--not his novels--but he's a marvelous, marvelous short-story writer, and those influenced me. I guess it was still later that Gorky's short stories played a role. But as I look back upon the early influences, it was really Andrejev and O'Flaherty--was it O'Flaherty as early as that? Maybe not, maybe a little later--I think Galsworthy, O'Neill somewhat, as a playwright somewhat, Strindberg and Ibsen, I'd say, more, and André Malraux in Man's Fate. But my passion for writing had grown to such an extent that I was able to write a novel that was about--I think it was about 250 pages, during I think practically my final semester, one semester while carrying on all other things and getting A's and preparing for an oral exam in philosophy, which I took. So I guess I was full of steam at that time. And then I think that about finishes off college. I guess I must

have spent the summer--again I don't remember where I was that summer, but I'm sure that I must have spent it in writing. Oh yes, in order to get into the Yale Drama School, you had to submit a one-act play, and I wrote a play and was accepted.

GARDNER: What was the play?

MALTZ: I don't know what the play was. Alas, I threw away all that earlier writing. To my great regret. I would be so interested to be able to see it now. But at a given point a few years later I thought, you know, it's all junk, and I didn't have the sense that when I was older I might find it interesting, and I didn't have anyone to advise me, and that was that. So I tossed it away. And I think maybe at this point we might end our session.

GARDNER: And pick up again in New Haven.

MALTZ: And pick up again in New Haven.

SECOND PART AUGUST 12, 1976

GARDNER: Now, at the end of the last tape, or the last session, as the transcriber knows, we said we'd resume in New Haven.

MALTZ: Yes, and that's where we will. The Yale School of the Drama, which was its official name (I always refer to it as the Drama School), was established by George Pierce Baker, who previously had been at Harvard for some years, where he established the celebrated 47 Workshop, which was a workshop in playwriting.

And two of the most distinguished students he had in Harvard were Eugene O'Neill, and a second never proved to be a playwright--Thomas Wolfe. He found his strength elsewhere. Baker, as I recall, wanted Harvard to provide him with a whole theater so that students could not only study playwriting, but even if their purpose was to become playwrights, that they would have a knowledge of directing and of the other aspects of theater, lighting for instance (to know something about lighting is not unimportant for a playwright in the period of dress rehearsals when he can make his own suggestions on lighting), and to know something about scene design, know something about costumes. And Harvard didn't want to put up the money, as I understand it, but Yale offered to do so and he came to Yale.

I don't know exactly what year it was he came to Yale. I think the school was moderately new when I came there in 1930, the fall of 1930, perhaps it was about five years old, maybe somewhat more, I'm not sure. It had a student body of about 200, I think at that time, and to my best recollection, about 20 percent were women. It was a perfectly splendid school. The faculty was very, very good in all departments, and everyone on the faculty was in earnest and wanted to give all that could be given to the students. The atmosphere was serious and in earnest; hard work was expected and hard work was given. The departments included

everything except acting, although plays were put on there. There was playwriting, directing, speech and dialects (which of course is an aspect of acting), costumes, lighting, set design. And the actual history of the drama school is one in which an immense number of men and women who have been prominent in the theater, and successful in the theater and also in film, for the last forty-five years have been graduates of the Yale School of the Drama. Now, that was not the only drama school in the United States. There was one at Pittsburgh that was quite good, as I understand it, and good people came out of it. But there was just an overwhelming majority of people in the Broadway theater, and also people teaching at universities, heading up departments of drama, who came through the Yale Drama School.

George Pierce Baker, I might just comment for a moment on, was a man from Boston and a man of great personal reserve, who had a dry wit, was certainly by present standards (but even by standards such as I had at the time) rather prissy concerning language in plays, but was a man with a very great feel for the theater. [He] was an excellent teacher, was very honest in his approach to students and was certainly very liberal about ideas in theater, even though he himself might have been, let's say, a rather conservative guy. He was, I think, probably about fifty-five or perhaps even sixty when I was a student there. I certainly learned

from him, but I think I learned even--and I learned from him not only from. . . . Oh, I think I might pause to say that in the first year our class perhaps numbered about thirty, and there were students attending the classes on playwriting whose main interest was directing, but they were allowed to attend. And one of the things that we did was to read and study a very good book he had written on playwriting, which, if one were to read today, the majority of playwrights he referred to in his illustrations and whose work he gave are not only dead, but their names would not even be known today. Because he was naturally drawing on the theater as he had known it, which meant from, let's say, playwrights (aside from classic playwrights like Ibsen and Strindberg), more current playwrights like Arthur Wing Pinero, who was to him a very living playwright. So he was giving illustrations from plays of 1890, 1900, 1910, and so on. But his book on playwriting was I think a superb one. I don't recall his giving particular lectures; he might have at the beginning of the course, but I don't remember that.

But his main mode of teaching was to read aloud a play by one of the students at each session, and then have the students comment on that play and then sum up his own comments. Now, that had great value, [and] it was something that I followed later when I taught myself. It had

great value because one of the very important things for a writer is to develop his own critical faculties toward his own work. The tendency when one begins, and if you write something with some enthusiasm, you may feel that it's absolutely great (if you don't feel that it's absolutely rotten), but there isn't real perspective. And listening to the plays of someone else, making your comments, listening to the comments of other students, then hearing Baker's comments was a slow process, because it can't come quickly, by which you began to develop a self-critical faculty. It's possible for me now, let's say, to reread a scene or a chapter I have written, and while not being 100 percent perfect in what I do, to say, "Oh, this is too long here. It lacks a core of drama at this place." I can see things about my own work that I was utterly unable to see when I was beginning.

In some ways I learned more about playwriting, however, from the instructor in directing, whose name was Alexander Dean. Because in dealing with directing he inevitably touched on aspects of playwriting; in dealing in the way in which a director could build tension in a scene by the way he handled his actors, he was dealing with the ways in which writers could improve their work. He dealt with such important questions as to the nature of a villain. For instance, if a villain is just a coarse heavy, in the way that we've seen it in so many Hollywood films, he's much less

interesting than if he is a person of intelligence, of aspects that are admirable, but at the same time has within him a drive that results in his villainy. He becomes more human, he becomes more interesting, and the entire drama is raised up on a much higher plane just because your villain is not the conventional heavy.

Questions like this began to occupy my thoughts very much because they're really philosophical questions about aspects of the drama. Aristotle's Poetics, which I first read in college, began to come back, and now in terms of practical drama and not merely the theory of drama. For instance, the question of a fatal flaw in an otherwise high-minded character is one which takes one into the realm of tragedy. Such questions as the fact that you can mix light comedy and tragedy, or farce comedy and melodrama within the same play, were discussed, but that you cannot mix farce and tragedy--that's impossible to do, they're too far a reach; the world of farce is too far away from reality. Now, as a matter of fact, I observed that over the years to be absolutely sound, and there's only one dramatic work that I've ever known that successfully breached that, and that was Charlie Chaplin's Monsieur Verdoux, because he does go, in the same film, from farce to tragedy. I know of no other work that I've ever read or seen in the theater, and no work in film, that did that. Those that have tried it have

floundered. [There were] many other such questions that by now I would have absorbed automatically, just as I can no longer, for instance, recite the rules of grammar which I once knew. If someone began to ask me about the subjunctive, I really don't know what the subjunctive is--I think it involves the word if but I'm not sure--but I'm quite sure I use it correctly in the main. So in the same way, things that I was then studying I've long since incorporated. I would have to stop and ponder to give further illustrations. I don't think there's any great point to it.

I would mention two other people. Donald Oenslager, who was an extremely successful Broadway scene designer, taught set design up at school and would come up, I guess, for about two days a week, and this was an example of the caliber of the people. There was a lighting expert there who did various kinds of government projects at different times but taught lighting at the school. And John Mason Brown, the theater critic and lecturer, came up and gave a course of lectures while I was there. He was amusing but rather superficial. I was very interested later on to read that on D-Day, when American troops landed in France, John Mason Brown was on a battleship keeping up a steady report of the action to the men below decks who couldn't see what was going on, and apparently, at that he was simply marvelous.

Interestingly, later, after the war he became an immensely popular lecturer around the country for women's clubs and so on. He was a very witty man.

GARDNER: The training was very much technical, then, and disciplinary, wasn't it?

MALTZ: Well, let's say, as someone who was majoring in play-writing, I also had some classes in costume, but not nearly as many, and in lighting and in set design. I remember I had to draw up some sets and so on. Particularly, there was practical work when a play was put on. There were plays that were put on just for the student group and the faculty in a little theater that was down there, and that was for workshop purposes. For instance, I remember one of the things that we learned was to distinguish between writing, acting, and directing when we saw a play. I can do now what I remember doing there on one exam, saying the directing was fine but the play was not good. Because you don't usually find that, for instance, among critics. They usually say, well, the directing was great, and for all you know, often they're referring to something that was already in the script, say, a movie script. But it is possible to make those distinctions.

We would have that kind of play put on, but then we also put on plays for the public. They would run about four or five nights, and there was a subscription audience that

came to them; I think they came free, but they had to be on a list. And those either were classics or the best plays that were done by students. And for that we had sets and costumes and so on; if it was my turn to be on the set crew, I was involved in building the sets, and then in managing them backstage, in changing sets and so on. Or in costumes: I remember once working, ironing for many hours on a new type of costume that was being tried for a Shakespearean play where they wanted to try the experiment of having very heavy canvas costumes and changing the colors of the costumes by changing lights. And so I was always ironing heavy wet canvas by the hour. And then I acted in a play or two, and all of this totality of experience was useful in making one a total person of the theater. Am I going at too great length in here?

GARDNER: No, not at all. I'm fascinated by the depths in which you were trained. I think that's really interesting.

MALTZ: Yes, it was a total immersion in the theater. One aspect of life up there for me was reading of plays. I read voraciously, and this meant early hours, less sleep, and so on. But I started with Ibsen, and I don't know whether anything of Strindberg's was assigned to us in the course, but I found Strindberg most impressive. I read everything that I got my hands on (there was a fine drama library there): all of Ibsen, all of O'Neill. And although our

basic orientation was to the Ibsen-Eugene O'Neill school of writing and the well-made play, let's say, the well-made three-act play, more or less, there was considerable interest on the part of certain of the students, myself included, in German impressionism and expressionism as it had exploded after World War I in the 1920s. A play like Ernst Toller's Masse Mensch meant a great deal to us. Georg Kaiser's--was it From Morn to Midnight? I think, I'm not sure--meant a great deal, and as a matter of fact, reflected itself in the second play that George Sklar and I wrote, though I'll come to that later.

GARDNER: Did you know Brecht's work at all at that point?

MALTZ: No. I had seen a play of Brecht's in Berlin in '29. Did I mention that in talking about it?

GARDNER: No, you didn't.

MALTZ: Well, when I was in Germany on that trip to Europe, I saw The Threepenny Opera. I didn't know German, but the production interested me very much, and I brought home a set of records, seventy-eight [RPM] records, which I played. George Sklar and I, after we were collaborating, just played it to the point where I think we wore holes in it; it was unplayable afterwards. And we were very interested in that music. But there was no Brecht studied at--he was not a name at all, you see. He was really not a name in the United States until after World War II, when he went back

[to East Berlin]. And by the way--do you want to shut off a second? I'll ask you a technical question. [tape recorder turned off]

I had a flash thought to something that occurred to me: when I came to Mexico to live and discovered Mexican art, not only contemporary art but of course the art of centuries back, which was so rich and old, I realized that I had taken one year in the history of art when I was at Columbia. We had Greek art and Roman art and Egyptian art and a little bit of the art, I guess, of India, perhaps of China, I don't remember, and then went through all of European art from early Christian art on, up to modern art. But Mexican art was not even mentioned. And here was Mexico, contiguous with the United States, physically, and absolutely not one word about Mexican art in the year 1929, say, which is a fascinating . . .

GARDNER: It really is.

MALTZ: . . . fascinating thing to realize. And as a matter of fact, the Spanish that I took there was the theta Spanish, the classical Spanish of Spain; it was not Spanish as it's spoken in Mexico, which of course now would serve people much better if they knew that. Anyway. . . .

GARDNER: But I think that--this is a curious aside--but I think that that's probably still true most places.

MALTZ: Oh, that they teach theta?

GARDNER: Outside of the West, Southwest. I suspect most universities teach the Castilian.

MALTZ: Castilian, yes. I was thinking of the word. I suppose that may be true. However, Castilian and Mexican Spanish can understand each other without any problem. And later, I don't want to forget to tell about how I spoke in Israel with people who were speaking Ladino.

One of the things that I discovered and advised students ever since, and it would be true for film as well as the theater, is that if I came upon a playwright, like O'Neill, who is impressive, or Strindberg, it was very good to take one play that I liked, and having read it through and knowing the story, to read it a second time and a third time and a fourth time. Because then, after you knew the story and felt the emotion, you began to see how he got his effects. It was as though you, I don't know--as though you looked under the hood of a car for the first time, and then took a carburetor and took it apart, and you began to say, "Oh, this is what it does!" For instance O'Neill had a technical device (in the best sense, nothing derogatory in my saying that) which he used to use often: he would have a long line of suspense, and then a sudden surprise that led to another line of suspense. Now, surprise is a very effective device in the theater: it shakes one up, it shocks one, it comes . . . well, it's a surprise.

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MALTZ: I was saying that surprise is the effect of a moment and has its important uses in theater or film. But it is never to be substituted for suspense if there has to be a choice between them, because suspense is what can keep you on the edge of your seat for a sequence or an act, and surprise, as I said, is of the moment.

Now, I remember when I was teaching I would try to impress my students with the importance of suspense through various illustrations. And one of them was this: I'd say, supposing you raise a curtain and a man and wife come into an apartment and sit down to talk about a play that they've just seen, an experience they've just had together, and they just chitchat about it, and the audience will sit there waiting for something to happen. Or, if they disliked it, they will say it is too talky. You often read critics saying a film was too talky, a play was too talky. Well, they really don't know what they're talking about because all theater is talk. That's what theater is--it's talk. How much actual physical action do you have in the theater? You have more in film. We have a car chase in a film; you can have no talk, and you can just have autos chasing each other, and it can be

suspenseful. But in theater you might have an occasional fight that would last, faking, half a minute, but that's all. It's talk. But the difference between a play that they say is too talky and a play that is not too talky is that the one that is not too talky has drama in it, and conflict, and suspense, and you find it interesting, therefore you say it isn't talky. Talky means the absence of any suspense.

To go back to the illustration I made: if you have two people talking about the fact that, let's say, they took a walk in the park, and they saw a bird of a certain color, and they thought it was beautiful, and then they saw a squirrel and got that squirrel to come over and take some peanuts, and then they watched some children on a bicycle, and after a while you say, "Hey, this isn't why I paid my money to come to the theater." But supposing before they come home you see a window open, and a masked man with a revolver in his hand steps through the window with a flashlight and begins to look around and take things out of drawers or examine drawers to see what he can take. And suddenly the door starts to open and he has no chance to get out, and he just hides right behind the sofa, and the two people come in and sit down on the sofa. And then they begin to talk about the bird and the boy and the squirrel, and you're on the edge of your seat. That's the difference

between suspense and no suspense in a play. You have to have that suspenseful thing going for you, and then you can characterize and you can give exposition and so on.

I might add, since it comes to my mind, that such things were taken up in directing like the "strengths" of various parts of a stage. If there are characters in the center of a stage, one's eye goes to them more than [to] characters on either side. But you can't keep your people in the center of the stage at all times because it would get visually boring, and you have to move them around. And so there are all sorts of skills, all sorts of knowledge involved, in how you make the stage fluid: when should you have something concentrated in the center stage, when should you have it stage left and stage right, or backstage center, or backstage right, or backstage left. [There are] all sorts of questions, as: Do you say the line first? Or, do you hand the knife to the person first? Which is the more dramatic? There're all sorts of technical questions like this, and all of them are part of what a good director knows when he directs.

The first play that I wrote was a one-act play, and I learned a lesson from that that I've never forgotten. I thought the play was a wonderful one when I gave it to Mr. Baker to read, and he only said one thing to me: he said, "You know, Mr. Maltz, it's very easy to write empty symbolism."

And I thought it over, and he was right; I was trying to do something that was important and impressive, but I really didn't know what I was trying to say. I had nothing clear that I could state, and that's what it was--it was empty symbolism. It reminds me so much of some of the plays of this period where I think authors have been given license to think they're writing well when they're really writing very obscurely. When I sit in the theater and I cannot understand what a play is about, and when there are sometimes great symbols in it, as in--I think it is Ionesco's Caligula, I'm not sure what it is. . . .

GARDNER: No, Camus did Caligula.

MALTZ: Is it Camus's Caligula? Yes, I think this is being done as a film now with Vidal doing the screenplay. All I can say is I saw it in a theater in New York, and I didn't know what the devil it was about and it bored me. To take another kind of thing which is comparable, the marvelous, the poet who. . . . Robinson Jeffers--what is the vehicle that Judith Anderson played in so much? It has a Greek name. . . .

GARDNER: I've forgotten.

MALTZ; Is it the Sophocles play?

GARDNER: Antigone, is that it?

MALTZ: No, it isn't Antigone. It's the play where her children. . . .

GARDNER: Medea.

MALTZ: Medea . . . are taken from her. Now, that is marvelous poetry, marvelous drama, and marvelously clear--the opposite of one of the others. But I think that we have seen so much empty symbolism in a great deal of modern painting and in a great deal of modern sculpture, and I have never perceived it as a value. This goes way back, and I just haven't changed in that area.

One aspect of life at Yale was that it was my first knowing encounter with homosexuality. A rather significant portion of the excellent faculty and a significant minority of the students were homosexuals. Now, homosexuality has rather a long, acceptable history in the theater, and some of our finest theater people--actors, directors, producers--have been homosexual. And the attitude of people within the theater has been much more accepting of sexual life-style that isn't the majority style than the rest of society. I know that in the thirties, when one found this in the theater or one found this at Yale, the attitude that I had would have been very different from the attitude of most American men. And I didn't have the derisive attitude that, let's say, average American men would have had towards homosexuals--not, I think, because I had at that time any greater understanding of the nature of homosexuality, as the fact that I had come so immediately to respect the integrity,

the teaching abilities, the intelligence, the knowledge of these men on the faculty, say.

And then in retrospect I realized that the teacher who had given me so much, and whom I admired so much, at Columbia College, Irwin Edman, also had been a homosexual. Because there had been an incident once, when I was at his apartment for my seminar on Santayana, that I didn't understand at the time. He asked me to wait while he got into bed and said that I could put out the light for him. We were friends by that time, and if another friend had asked me that, I would have said, "Well, he wants that; fine, I'll do it." But then there were some overtones. There was nothing that he attempted to do physically, but I kind of just sensed vibrations that I didn't understand but that made me uncomfortable. But when I got to Yale I realized that this man must have been a homosexual, although nothing was ever said on the campus about it (because I'm sure he was very discreet), and that he never in any way did anything but set a situation where, if he were dealing with a student who was homosexual, something would have happened. But since I didn't know what a homosexual was at that time, why. . . . You see, it's a laughing matter now because anyone of college age is hep to that in our society, but it wasn't so at that time. There may have been any number of students around who were homosexual. I didn't know it, and I never

heard any conversation about it. And there were never any jokes about it; it just didn't exist in that society. And I'm sure that if I had said to my father that someone was a homosexual, he wouldn't have known what it was, simply wouldn't have known.

It was a very different aspect in the society at that time, so that when I met it at Yale, it was being confronted by a completely new phenomenon. And all I know is that it never lessened my respect for those teachers who were homosexuals, or I don't know whether I had. . . . You know, I was friendly with students there who were homosexual, with some lesbians, but I guess none of them were any particular close friends of mine. I lived off campus, as everyone did (there were no dormitories for people of the Yale school), and we who went to the Yale school were so heavily engaged in our work that we had no contact with the rest of the university at all. We were encapsulated in that one building which was the theater, and then we had rooms wherever we had them.

I had there, I think, my first encounter with people who were concerned about family. I believe that in fact when I was in college, my roommate, Beryl Levy, gave me some information that I had simply not known: that German Jews had looked down upon Jews of Polish or Russian origin, or other East European, and that Sephardic Jews in their

turn had looked down upon Germans, and I had simply not known anything about this. But now I met something else.

There was a girl I got a crush on, and had a tender and affectionate friendship with for a number of years, who was a very sweet girl but automatically carried with her the attitude of the long Boston line from which she came of saying about someone else (not someone like myself, but someone else from Boston), "Oh, she has no family." And I'd never met this in my life before. I'd never heard my parents or anyone else talk about the importance of lineage. Now, this lineage didn't make this nice, sweet, very attractive girl any more intelligent than she was, or any more learned than she wasn't, but family was important to her and eminently important to her family. And that was very interesting to me.

I had a good many friends at Yale, but I'm not going to mention them because they proved not to be lasting friends, and not in the sense that I didn't--I kept up with some of them for a number of years after I left Yale, but my life went in a different direction. I was not in close contact with them physically in any way, that is, I didn't live in the same city. And it's all forty-five years ago, and there's no particular reason to go into it. But I would speak of several who remain in the picture.

One is George Sklar, who is my oldest friend, and our lives have been together, really, ever since we came together

and started to write together in the fall of 1931. We not only collaborated together on several plays but when we came down to New York we lived in the same apartment house. Later, when he married and I married, we were a foursome of friends. I drove--he doesn't drive a car--and I drove two of his children to be born. The children are to me somewhat surrogate children of mine; he has three, he and his wife. And we've been close down the years and remain so. George came from a family in Meriden, Connecticut, which was a factory town, and his father was a factory worker for quite some years, I believe, in a factory that was making umbrellas for a while, but then it turned to munitions during World War I. Subsequently, he and his wife opened a sporting-goods store, and it was a kind of a hanging-out place for the men of town who would come in there to get their things for fishing or their ammunition for hunting, and would stay around swapping stories. And very interestingly, after his father died (he died when he was rather young), his mother carried on the store by herself. There was many a man in the town who came to unload his troubles to this foreign-born Jewish woman, speaking with a considerable accent, but the center of an entire circle of townspeople. It was very delightful.

A second friend there was Elia Kazan, who got the nickname "Gadget" there, as I recall, given by a mutual

friend, because Kazan was very handy with his hands, and when making sets, he would always have a tool there or something, and he was called Gadget. That's my recollection of it. I think he may have come here either as an infant from Turkey (his family was Greek) or else he was born here, but he knew from his family of the very harsh treatment of Greeks which he embodied in his later film, America, America. He was never an intimate friend of mine at Yale, but we were very cordial friends and remained so in later years. Until the time that he became an informer, and of course [our friendship] ended.

He was a very interesting man. He had a capacity for what I would call powerful silence. He could be with others and talk very little--not that he wasn't capable of considerable talk when he was so minded, but one would feel his presence very much even though he was silent. [He was a] very intense-looking man, not conventionally good looking in any way, great intensity. It perhaps didn't surprise me when, after the first summer away, we came back the second year, he asked me to read a play he had written over the summer, although he was there to study directing. And when I read it, the amount of violence in the play was simply appalling. We're getting a great deal of violence in films now, but this was in a different period, and it would hold a candle to the most violent things that you

could see nowadays. I think it was an example of some of what was inside of him.

A third man with whom I was quite friendly and who had come down--he had been at college at Williams with Kazan--was Alan Baxter, who was an actor. And I mention him because he took the lead in a play of mine (I'll remark on that later), and he was a man I liked very much who had a great deal troubling him inside. As for others, I'll mention one or two others when they come up in turn, but I won't go into them.

During this time I had a growing social awareness, although not the time to read a good deal much about it. The Depression, of course, was becoming more and more acute. I'm quite sure I was reading the papers, newspapers, again, but rather intermittently, I imagine. I don't remember, without looking it up, just at what point Japan began its incursions into China, into Manchuria, into Shanghai. I think it was later. But I know that I was very outraged by that. And some time along in this period I think I started to read intermittently the Nation and the New Republic.

I don't remember whether it was in the spring of '32 or not until the fall semester, but I think it was the spring, I was invited, I don't know in what way, to the home of an attorney by the name of Charles Recht. He lived in

Larchmont or someplace like that, and that was a Sunday and there must have been about, oh, thirty young people there. For all I know, maybe I was invited by somebody who was a member of a Young Communist League and I didn't know it, something like that. This attorney, as I learned later, was a foreign-born man but very well spoken--I should say and very well spoken--was a civil liberties lawyer, not acting for the [American] Civil Liberties Union, but he took civil liberties cases, a good many of them labor cases.

And I just have the impression of that Sunday afternoon in his home as being kind of a small earthquake for me because he put very salient and pointed questions to us, shaking us out of accepted grooves of thought, challenging us, I'm sure, with left postulates and things out of Marx, and referring, I suppose, to the Soviet Union. I don't remember particulars, but I know that it had a kind of radicalizing effect upon me just in one afternoon. It changed me, it made me begin to search with different eyes and with different ears and a certain different perspective from then on. And that's all I remember, but it's worth mentioning because sometimes one meeting with one individual can have a very profound effect, and this did for me.

GARDNER: How did you then translate it into. . . ?

MALTZ: I didn't translate it into any action; I was busy at school. But it affected my mode of thought and provided, I

think, a certain platform from which thought and reading proceeded thereafter.

During this whole period, I, with friends, saw every opening of a play in New Haven, and it was one of the towns in which plays were brought for tryouts. And we also would take, I'd say, it might be a weekend a month, or a weekend every six weeks, that usually one friend and I, a man called Paul Scofield, would go down to New York, as I recall, on Friday and see a play. It might be Friday or it might be Saturday, but we'd see a play perhaps Friday night and Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, and come home Sunday morning, that kind of thing. And we'd always go to a speakeasy, usually the same one, because that was speakeasy time still, and it was a wonderful one which served venison. I found venison to be a great food, and it was always exciting to do the manly thing of going into a speakeasy and having a cocktail before dinner.

GARDNER: What was the speakeasy called, do you remember?

MALTZ: They were called--what, the name of it? They had no names, they just had addresses. As a matter of fact, my first acquaintanceship with speakeasies, not in terms of reading about them, of course, but in terms of going to one, was when I was in college. I couldn't wait as a freshman, as I recall, to go into a speakeasy, and I was so excited when I was admitted. I don't know as I went to many at that

time. But then when I was in Yale--I mean, I think after I had gone to a few in my freshman year, I never went to any again because I wasn't a drinker and there was no occasion for it. But when we were coming down from Yale, and my friend knew about this speakeasy where they served this delicious venison, it was just nice to go there and eat that before theater.

Now, during this period I'm sure that I was--just like every other student of playwriting at school--if you're a serious writer and you undertake to write plays or novels or anything else, you naturally have the hope and fantasy of being a fine writer. You'd hope that you might turn out to have the gifts of an O'Neill or an Ibsen, and you don't know whether you will, but that fantasy is a very normal one, and you keep hoping that it will be true. I know that that was mine. Now, I think that's probably a description of my first year.

In addition to the one-act play that I mentioned before, I must have begun a three-act play. I don't have any memory of a three-act play being read in that first year. I know that I handed in one when I came back in the fall, one that I worked on over the summer and perhaps I had begun in the spring, but I don't recall anymore.

GARDNER: Do you recall what sort of themes you were dealing with?

MALTZ: Yes, they were very personal. The themes at that time were not in any way social themes, which is an indication of the limits to which my own social thinking had taken me, since my themes later were very social. I know that I returned in the fall of '31 with a full-length play that had to do with my family. Whether or not I had read Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov shortly before or several years before, there were qualities of Brothers Karamazov that I believe were influencing my mood when I wrote this play. There's one line that I've never forgotten that one of the brothers says at one point. I think it is, "I must have justice done," or, "I must see justice." "I must have justice done," I think. And I know that that was in my mind, and it was not referring to social justice or political justice but was rather sort of moral justice. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] And so it was concentration upon this personal thing. I think in. . . . [tape recorder turned off] So my writing was involved with a concentration upon the personal.

I think I might mention here that I began to learn from my fellows something that I had not been aware of about myself--that I was considered an overserious young man. Now, I think that was certainly true, and it didn't mean that if somebody told a joke I wouldn't laugh, or that I didn't love the Marx Brothers, but that my general mien was

a very serious one--overserious, I would say--and it probably came [that way] from a number of factors. One was that there had been so much illness in my family on the part of my father, my mother's eyes, and so on, that life had kind of a grim aspect; the world seemed a kind of a dangerous and. . . . Oh, aligned with that, the psychological atmosphere of my family, as it influenced me, was one where the world was a dangerous place. So that there was a kind of tension in me, I think, that was just an underneath flow of current that caused a tightness. And I remember later, when I was in the Theatre Union, and the chief organizer of it was a man in his early forties, a World War I vet and vigorous, strong, full of laughter, when I found out he was about forty-three and I remembered my father at forty-three, it was an unbelievable shock. I didn't know that men of forty-three could be like that. I think of this in the light of a play that I was writing. It was a play about family tragedy and was a reflection of things within myself.

That summer I had several out-of-town visits. I spent the summer in my home, Brooklyn. I went up to Provincetown, where my friend from Yale, Paul Scofield, was with his mother. His mother was an artist. And there I met Hans Hofmann, the artist, and some others around him, and I had the reaction then that I've had today. I've never changed. I don't take any pride in never changing in any

area, but I couldn't understand his painting, I didn't get any pleasure from it, I didn't get any ideas from it, I didn't get any visual enjoyment from it. As you see by the rugs here, I am enchanted with Navajo rugs. Now, these are just patterns, but the patterns of most nonobjective painting I don't find have the beauty of this. I find they're empty of visual beauty, empty of intellectual meaning, empty of representational quality, such as, say, that Modigliani there. Or empty of what I get in that still life up above, because I love still life too. I just have never been able to get anything from it. Nor have I been willing to concede that it has particular merit. George--not George--Charles White, the artist whose work is representational, explained to me in ways that I thought I understood why Picasso and Picasso's nonobjective painting meant a great deal to him, even though he himself is a representational painter. And he gave, as one illustration, Joyce: that Joyce introduced for all writers the opportunity to do free-associational writing, and that even if you didn't practice it yourself, it changed all writing from then on. And so, he said, that was Picasso's contribution. And I understand that intellectually, but I don't see it. I love certain periods of Picasso's work--his Blue Period, Rose Period--but the three-headed, nonobjective stuff I never have been able to fathom. (And I might

say, since I just finished a piece of work on Modigliani, neither did he. Modigliani didn't. They were friends, well, they were kind of friendly enemies all the time, but Modigliani just didn't care for that stuff at all, which is interesting.)

And I also had another little glimpse at what I would call those people who live a great deal with family tradition, because I went up to the summer home of the girl on whom I had a crush. This was their summer home in Maine, a very large, formal house, where her mother was not present but her father looked me over. And it was just a very, very interesting insight for me into quite a different world. I later married a woman whose family tree was as long, or longer, than theirs, but she came from a lower-middle-class family, so it was an entirely different kind of thing.

The second year at Yale began in September '31 and actually ended prematurely sometime in March of '32 with, of course, the production of Merry Go Round, which I'll come to. Most of my friends of the first year had not returned to the school for the second year. And George Sklar, whom I had known but not been intimate with, we came together and began to see each other, and he was much more solidly aligned in his thinking and in his feeling with the American Left than I was. He had read a great deal more than I. He had firm opinions. And we used to discuss world

affairs and peace and war and so on. It was in this period that Japan was carrying out its brutal invasion of Manchuria and other sections of China. I reacted very intensely to this--as I would a few years later at Mussolini's rapacious conquest of Ethiopia.

The course in playwriting now was around a round table with about fifteen students, twice a week, and very shortly after I came there, I believe, I gave my play (that I'd written in the summer and then did some rewriting on) to be read, and it was read in the class with a great deal of warm response. I was very excited by that, and one of the instructors in the school who had contacts with the Group Theatre took it down to them. I was very excited by that because the Group Theatre was a new theater under the leadership of Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, and I was very interested in what they were doing and had liked very much several of the plays that they had done (they had this fine group of actors, of course, whom they were developing), but nothing came of that. As a matter of fact, I think they were already looking for more social materials.

Early in October, which means within about five weeks after my school opened, I came back about one in the morning from something or other and found a special delivery letter that my father had had a stroke. And I left school for,

oh, I suppose about a week, during which time he began to make something of a recovery. He was able before I left to talk again and make movements. And so I was able to return to school.

Sometime very early in November, I went to pick up George Sklar at the library, where he had a part-time job, at the main Yale library, to go to dinner with him. And he said, "While you're waiting, there's an article I just read in the New Republic that I'd like you to read." So I read it, and it was an exposé of something that had happened in Cleveland. A young laborer had witnessed a gang killing. I don't recall whether the police had happened on the scene so quickly that they knew he had witnessed it, or whether he'd told the police what he had seen, and they wanted him to testify. They wanted him to testify about the murder. I think they kept him in jail as a material witness so that he wouldn't get hurt. But very shortly, the gangster involved in the killing revealed privately to I think the city officials that he would--now I may be mixing up what we did in the play with the truth--but the fact was that he revealed the connections between these gangsters and the city officials. So that the young man they had wanted to testify against the gangster would, if he now testified against the gangster, cause the administration great grief. And so he became an enemy of the administration, all in

his own innocence, and one morning was found hanged in his cell, an alleged suicide.

When I came back to George and said, "Hey, I think there's a play," he said, "That's what I think." And we went to dinner and talked about it, walked home, and by the time we got back to, I guess, the area of the school, we had the broad outlines of a play. And we went right to work on it immediately. It went not easily, but rapidly. We worked very hard, while continuing in our classes, of course, and by around December tenth we had the main story in all its detail, the characters, and the first act written. And then I had to leave because it was urged upon my father that he take a sea trip and go elsewhere, for him to go to Los Angeles by boat through the canal, and with my mother and with a nurse, and it was very desirable that I accompany him. My father, as a result of the stroke, was in a very bad psychological state--all sorts of tensions, dissatisfactions, and great tension between him and my mother--and it was felt that I could be of help if I were there. And so I went and I took with me the outline that we had. I don't remember what the trip was, whether it was a ten-day trip or a two-week trip at that time, from New York, first to Havana, then to Panama City, and I had a day in each city, walking around--and then around up the coast to Los Angeles. But during the ten days, working at night when my father

was asleep and other times during the day when he was
alseep, I did the two acts and mailed them off to George.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 12, 1976

GARDNER: I had just asked, as the tape ran out, what the nature of your collaboration with George Sklar was. [tape recorder turned off] Okay?

MALTZ: George and I collaborated in the following way: we sat together and we thought out every idea together. That means we discussed and we also argued. And as I look back upon it, sometimes it was really very childish of us, because let's say if I said, "Well, Joe should say, 'yes,'" and he'd say, "No, I think he should say 'uh-huh.'" I don't know whether we would do it today; I doubt it. I know I wouldn't, and I don't think he would either. It really made no difference if you said "uh-huh" or "yes." And if I were watching a play of George's and a man said, "uh-huh," I would find it acceptable; if he were watching a play by me and a man said, "yes," he would find it acceptable. But we were growing as writers, seeking to find our way of saying things, trying to mold our styles, and therefore we sometimes could spend a lot of time over a thing like that. It was waste time but, I suppose, necessary to us as persons.

However, we got along well enough in this, or else we wouldn't have been able to do the play and do it as rapidly as we did. And so every line of dialogue, when

we were together, was worked out together. Of course, then when I sent back the two acts that I had done in first draft, George worked them over by himself, and then we came together and worked on them together. And that's frequently a way in which other collaborators work. One does a first draft and then they work together; or sometimes one does a draft of one act, another one drafts another act, and so on. But that was the way George and I worked on that play and also on our second play.

I didn't stay in Los Angeles more than about, I guess, a week to see my parents set up in a hotel, and on my way back I stopped at two places to see old friends--one was Kenesaw Mountain Landis, whom I mentioned, and I stopped off at Logansport, Indiana. I think I must have stayed at his home, because I saw in a diary that I had at the time that I met his father, and I have no recollection of meeting his father; and also [I saw] that we had an agreement that if his father ran for a certain public office next spring, I would come out and help campaign with him. And this I just don't remember at all. But what I do remember was our warm reunion and the fact that, through his father's acquaintanceship, we were taken on a tour of the giant U.S. Steel mill at Gary, Indiana. That's right outside of--it must have been Gary, Illinois, right outside of Chicago.

GARDNER: Gary, Indiana.

MALTZ: Is it Gary, Indiana?

GARDNER: Yes. The Illinois and Indiana are. . . .

MALTZ: I see. And that was a very profound experience, because here was this massive plant, and let's say if there were thirty smokestacks, I don't remember how many there were, perhaps there was one smoking. And [there were] these immense yards and the immense inside areas for steel, and just a few men working and just a little bit going on. I think it was working at perhaps, I don't know, 12 percent of capacity, or something like that. And it was a very dramatic lesson in what this Depression was doing.

And then I stopped off at Columbus, Ohio, to see my old instructor Peter Odegard, who had moved there and was on the faculty there, and who had, in about the six months before I saw him, been on a sabbatical in Germany. Now, this was not too long before the Nazis took power, so he was in a Germany that was convulsed and he went interviewing Nazis. He went interviewing the Communist party officers. And I remember that he had tales at that time which began to awaken me. One awful thing pops into my mind of the Nazis grabbing someone, I think a Communist, and they of course had descended into this type of street warfare, and getting him down to a cellar and poking his eyes out with a billiard cue. And this was the kind of thing that he came

back with and, I'm sure, affected my thinking very much.

George and I finished our mutual work on Merry Go Round by about January 10. It was read to the students, and I remember Alexander Dean said it was the best play ever done by students at Yale, and they scheduled it for immediate spring production. We both had in mind, after the reception of the play, trying to get a Broadway production for it, and from some place I must have gotten the name of an agency called, I think it was, the Pinker-Morrison Agency, or maybe it was just Eric Pinker. Morrison, who was Pinker's wife (I forget her first name), was one of the three Bennett sisters, the actresses. Which one she was, I don't know, but she had been an actress and retired and was acting as an agent and was married to Eric Pinker, who was a very well-spoken Englishman whose father was a very respected and successful agent in England. Now, I'm going to pause for a moment about him, because although he and his wife served us very well--let me see, when was I on the board of the Dramatists Guild? Oh, maybe by about '35 or so. It doesn't make any difference.

GARDNER: Yes, it would be around the last part of the thirties.

MALTZ: In '35, '36. I was part of a decision that the guild had to make about turning data on Eric Pinker over to the district attorney's office. He had represented a woman

who lived in California. She was a novelist, I think, and she was an invalid confined to a wheelchair, but perfectly able to write. And a sum of considerable money, I don't remember whether it was something like \$30,000 (which was a lot of money in that time) or even more money, Pinker had withheld from her for an undue time after receiving it, and then had doled out part of the money to her and had never given her the full amount. It was a clear case of fraud. And she had appealed to the Dramatists Guild, I believe, or maybe it was the Authors League. It must have been when I was on the Authors League executive board. And she had appealed, and this finally was brought to the attention of the district attorney, and this very urbane, well-dressed English gentleman went to Sing Sing. Since my uncle had been there, and was of such a different kind, and I knew the Sing Sing background, it had always been my desire to write a story about that. But there have been a lot of stories like that which I've had in my files, and life somehow has not worked out for my writing them. But it is still a story that I would be interested in writing. Because one somehow doesn't expect that that type of person will turn out to do such a cheap, dirty thing as cheat an invalided author out of her royalties.

During the period that the Pinker-Morrison office was submitting Merry Go Round around, I remember we went

to see a number of different producers. The only one whose name I can recall was Jed Harris, who was then an immensely successful, respected, and electric figure in the American theater (and deservedly so) for the plays that he had directed and produced. And I guess he just wanted to see who these boys were, because. . . . Oh, I remember--I'll interrupt--I remember he kept us waiting for a long time. He lived in some house on the East Side, and we just had to hang around outside. We hadn't brought along anything to read, and so I think I did something that was sort of typical with me: went down and found a little candy store or something, and bought a--no, I don't remember now whether I bought a tennis ball and played a game that we used to play, putting a dime on a crack and then trying to hit it, each an equidistance away, or whether we pitched pennies against a wall. But it was very much part of my automatic thinking that if you had an hour like that, or any length of time, you played a game. I was still going on the way I had as a kid. (I remember going for a walk in a snowstorm up at Yale with Gadget Kazan and Baxter. Well, we made snowballs, we threw them at each other, at cars, at houses, at everything, just carrying on in that way.)

And so then we were ushered into the great man's presence. He just wanted to look at the boys, I think, because he said, well, he had just done such-and-such a play

and he didn't want to do another political thing or whatever, and that was about it. We were disappointed. And I think it was shortly after that that I heard a marvelous story that I've never forgotten.

George Kaufman once came to his house for a session on something, and when Harris admitted him, or when he was admitted by the butler (I think he had a butler), he found Harris naked, and he didn't say anything. They had their discussion for however long it was, and Harris of course wondering, waiting all this time--why didn't Kaufman say something? And then he just said goodbye, and then he paused at the door and said, "By the way, Jed, your fly's open," [laughter] which was of course a perfect George Kaufman thing, just perfect.

Our play, after having been refused by not all producers but a considerable number of them came to a couple of young men: one was Walter Hart and the other was Michael Blankfort. Now, these two men were both a couple of years older than George and myself, but only a couple. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] Hart and Blankfort had been at the University of Pennsylvania together, and Blankfort had majored in psychology, I believe, and had already taught a year at Princeton in psychology. But they were both interested in theater, and a year before, they had taken a play that others had rejected called Precedent,

which was about the Mooney-Billings case. They had produced it with success at the Provincetown [Playhouse] theater in Greenwich Village, on Macdougall Street, as I recall, the one that had seen the beginning works of Eugene O'Neill with the Provincetown Players. And this theater, which seated only about 100 to 150 people, was used as a kind of a tryout place. Critics would come down and review plays that were done there because it was known that it was used in this way, and the hope was that if the play got good reviews, then there would be offers from uptown Broadway producers to bring it uptown. Since we had no better opportunity and since they had done well with Precedent, we signed a contract with them, and rehearsals started about the twenty-second of March, as I recall, right around in that period. And we found that Walter Hart was doing just beautifully in bringing the play alive, and doing things with it in the movement of actors and in the tempo--he had a marvelous sense of tempo which we hadn't visualized. And of course that's one of the great things of theater and indeed of film. If you write a novel or a story, nobody else adds anything to it, and the impact is there or not. But in theater, if you have a good play, and then it's well cast, and then it's well directed, something comes into existence that is better than the script you wrote. It couldn't have come without the script, without the play, but that marvelous melding

of actors well directed and the actors' qualities make it a living thing which is just marvelous.

In our case the producers didn't have money for the best actors available; it was done on a low budget. But they had, in the main, competent actors--some who were better than competent, some who were a little less. I remember one man who had a kind of an inability to walk well, and why he was cast in the first place, I don't know; but Walter Hart so staged things that he blurred that over.

There was a phenomenon in the rehearsal at that time. As I recall, [Actors] Equity, the actors' organization, had not yet achieved--yes, I'm sure of it--they had not yet achieved rehearsal money for actors; that came in later. And so we started to find the phenomenon, when we broke for lunch, of various actors saying, "Oh, I never eat lunch." And then, after a while, Walter Hart used to invite one or another of them out to lunch with us, and they ate. It was just that this was deep in the Depression and they were broke, and they didn't eat.

The play opened, and the reviews as a whole were very favorable; they went from middling favorable to excellent favorable. And the day after we opened, we had, I think, ten, twelve offers from different theater owners to go uptown.

GARDNER: Do you recall any of the specific reviews?

MALTZ: Well, I meant to ask you about that. I have scrap-books where I have reviews of all plays and novels and stories and movies and so on. What do we want to do about that? Do you want to turn it off while we talk about this? [tape recorder turned off] What were we talking about?

GARDNER: Well, we were talking about the following day after the premiere of Merry Go Round.

MALTZ: Oh, yes. The following day (and I may correct this; I'll listen to a tape before next week in which I gave some data on the Theatre Union)--I think we had about ten, twelve offers to take the play uptown. That meant that the owner of a given theater would finance the building of new sets and would arrange a rental agreement and so on, and we'd put on the play. Now, we were committed to running two weeks in the Provincetown; that was in our contract. That was fine because it allowed time for the sets to be built. And we had in our play a revolving stage, because Merry Go Round has a great, a good many, scenes, and in order to make things work rapidly, we used a revolving stage, which was then used in the theater rather more than I think it is now, and it was a very good device. The theater was packed after the reviews, a small theater, and very special people would come and search us out. For instance, D. W. Griffith came, and he was then out of film but hoping to get back. He wanted to make a film of the play, and

we of course were very interested, but he couldn't raise the money, and didn't. And Otto Kahn came down to look us over, and I guess we probably knew at that time that he was a patron of the arts, had been behind--what was the name of the theater he was behind? Oh, I should remember it . . . John Howard Lawson was in it and had plays produced . . . Francis Faragoh, John Dos Passos . . . I forget the name of it, but they had been doing theater in the late twenties [New Playwrights' Theatre]. And then came a very interesting man. He was someone whose name we knew because he was one of the friends of that great bon vivant, Mayor Walker, Mayor Jimmy Walker. Oh, I've omitted something very important.

During this whole period there was an investigation of the New York municipal administration, the mayor's office, going on, called the Seabury investigation (that was the name of the man [Samuel Seabury] doing the investigation, the chairman). And more and more had been exposed about the corruption of Mayor Walker's administration. In actual fact, when our play appeared I think Mayor Walker was about six months away from being summoned by Governor Franklin Roosevelt to appear before him for some kind of hearing connected with this. And instead of appearing before him, because I think it was a gubernatorial commission, Walker took off for England or France and never came back. He remained in exile

until his death, I believe, because if they'd pursued it enough, he would have gone to jail. He was a very engaging man, and behind the engagement he was as sleazy a crook and a companion of gangsters as one could ever imagine, a dreadful human being. But so many people were charmed by his wit and his debonair manners.

So that when our play, which we said took place in a midwestern city in our program, Cleveland or wherever it was, when we bound it up, we bound it up with something that read and looked like the Tammany administration. And we did it, of course, very purposefully. The reviews, some of them at least, made it very clear what this was about and where it pointed, and it was therefore a play with some explosive quality for the time. A. C. Blumenthal came to see us (I don't know whether we knew at the time that he was a crony of Mayor Walker's, or whether we found out later; we knew his name from the papers), and he came to George and me and said, "This is just such a marvelous play. But you're doing the wrong thing in going uptown now because plays can't last through the summer." (At that time there was no air cooling in theaters. And there was often, if a play was doing well, when it came into the real heat of the summer the play would close until the fall and reopen again. Or sometimes plays just died because of the heat; people couldn't be in a theater.) And he said, "I want to form a

company. I want to close this down, reopen it in the fall, make a film of it," and he tried to sell us on this. We didn't realize that there might be anything else behind it. In fact, I'm sure we didn't know he was in any way related to Walker, but we found out later. But we wanted our play to go on and we had a chance to go uptown. We wanted to go uptown, that was all. (He, by the way, fled to Mexico after Walker fled to Europe; he fled to Mexico and was there, I believe, until his death. I think, I'm not sure, that he was married to a former chorine called Peggy Fears, who, it was suggested, was also one of Walker's girls.) But what he wanted to do was to get us to shut up our play; he'd get control of it, and he would bury it. And so without realizing it, we didn't give him the opportunity.

Well, when the two weeks were up, we went uptown. We had perhaps a week of rehearsals, I'm not sure, a few days of rehearsals on the larger stage, and were to open on a Monday night. And around seven o'clock Monday, police on horses, as well as some police on foot, came to the street. It was Forty-fifth Street, the Avon Theatre, a very good theater on a street full of theaters, and they said that the play couldn't open because the theater did not have an up-to-date fire license. Now, it proved to be so that the theater didn't have an up-to-date fire license because of the custom among theaters: they would apply for their license, and in

due course the license would come without respect to the particular date of lapse. But in the meantime the theaters would keep playing. And there were other theaters on the same street that didn't have their new licenses, but they were playing. Only, the administration was using this in order to prevent the play from opening.

Well, it was front-page news the next day. The means that the administration was using was so transparent that nobody was fooled by it. The American Civil Liberties Union came into the case right away, and I remember Mayor Walker was seen by reporters, and he was quoted as saying that he hadn't seen the play; he just understood it wasn't a good one. And that he had nothing to do with this; this was just the fire department.

But they couldn't make it stand up, and so the fire department issued the license. But they then demanded that all of the curtains be fireproofed again. I remember the day before the play opened again, an officer of the fire department stood with a long, lighted taper burning away in his hand next to the curtain, trying to set the curtain on fire to prove that it was improperly fireproofed. But they also said we had to have an orchestra pit even though there was no orchestra required in our play, and no music. But they took out about four front rows of seats, just as a means of molesting the theater. (And in the fall, when the first

play to open there was one produced by Peggy Fears, they put the seats back again.)

And so finally the play opened. Now, George and I had gone around that week, and we were all hot, and Blankfort said, "The play's going to run forever. It's gotten such magnificent front-page notices, you know, this is just marvelous, it's great." But it didn't run forever at all. In spite of a quite full house on opening night, the audiences began to dwindle, and it limped along for about six weeks and then closed.

GARDNER: Why is that, do you suppose?

MALTZ: I think I know absolutely why it is, because I tried to study it out. And I believe that it's a lesson that I think has stood me in good stead all my life, and I've seen the same mistake made by others. We wrote an honest play, in that we followed what happened in life in Cleveland. We had our bellboy, at first with the police saying, "We want you to be man enough to testify and you'll help clean up the city." And the bellboy's scared because he witnessed an accidental--we had a bellboy, that's right, who witnesses a gang killing accidentally. But finally he's persuaded that he will testify. And then the brother of the gangster who is under arrest comes around with his little book and says, "Here are the names and addresses of everyone with whom we've had financial relations in the administration,

and this is going to hit the paper unless you quash the indictment against my brother." And at this point the bellboy becomes a danger, and it ends up with his being found hanged in his cell.

Now, I learned a real lesson from that. I remembered Aristotle's Poetics: that in a tragedy, your hero would have to have a fatal flaw, which made him human. But he went down to his death bloody but unbowed because he was a man of dignity. He was a tragic figure because he had dignity, because he was noble. But he was human at the same time, and his flaw brought about his demise. So if you will, let's say the death of Macbeth is a tragedy. In many ways he's a--or Othello is better; he's a noble man but he has a fatal flaw, which is his too-quick jealousy.

There was no flaw in the bellboy. Aesthetically speaking, it was as though we were asking the audience to watch a child being run over on a street, and its head squashed. Now, in life children are run over on the street, but there's the difference between life and art. You cannot always do in art what is acceptable in life. And when the audience watched this innocent bellboy being crushed and finally hanged, they came out of the theater and wanted to beat their head against a wall. They hadn't witnessed a tragedy which purged them in their understanding of what can happen in life; they had just seen a child run over. And if

you saw a child run over and its head squashed, you'd probably vomit, you'd feel sick, you'd want to cry. And you don't say to people, "Hey, I saw a great play last night. You've got to go see it." You say, "Hey, stay away from it, it's just . . . it kills you."

To get another example of the difference between life and art, which I learned even earlier through a play that was done at Yale, you can read in a book that a man on a chain gang is whipped, or a slave is whipped and blood spurts from his back. But put that on a stage, and if you simulate, well, blood spurting from the back of a slave, as you could do, you'd find your audience getting up and walking out; they couldn't take it. I saw audiences walk out of a play in Yale called Steel in which my friend Alan Baxter had the central part. He was [playing] an ignorant Slav immigrant, and he was walking on top of a building, or he went up on a building to look for something, and by accident he picked up the cone with which men used to catch rivets (in the days when they threw rivets from one floor to another), and he caught a hot rivet which was thrown in there and put his hand in on it . . . and screamed. People got up and left the audience. They could not take that. It was just too painful. But you could read about it.

GARDNER: Or you could put it in a film.

MALTZ: You can put it in a film, but in a film. . . . I was

hiding my eyes, and so was my wife, the other day in The Return of a Man Called Horse, where they have a terrible Indian rite--well, I couldn't watch it, could not watch it. And usually what they do is they have a quick cut and go away. It's kind of bloodless. Film can mask things.

So I felt I had learned a very important thing about the nature of drama and of tragedy, and what you cannot do in just an unrelenting drama. [background noise] Let me shut this off and ask my wife to stop making. . . . [tape recorder turned off] And so that was, to me, a very important lesson, and I have seen illustrations of playwrights and film writers going wrong on that. For instance, you don't feel that way in a true tragedy like Man for All Seasons. At the end of that a man is decapitated, that's how it ends, but he has fought for something knowing the dangers involved. He has refused to bend, and at the end he walks up to the platform, and he gives a penny to the man who's going to cut his head off, and you say, "Yes, it's too bad he dies, but he dies fighting for something." And you're ennobled by what he did, and you feel purged in the Aristotelian sense, and you don't feel like beating your head against a wall. You say, "How admirable and wonderful," and it's an entirely different feeling. It's a fascinating point of aesthetics to me.

GARDNER: That is! It's interesting especially in the light of the war films that became popular in the middle sixties and on about the meaninglessness of death. Because despite the fact that the life isn't one like Thomas More's, in which nobility is played out to the end, and the death can be, not necessarily accidental, but not purposeful in any way, not due to tragic flaw, nonetheless there is the same sentiment, the same feeling in the audience that the person is dying for a reason, a cause. That's sort of a statement and a question, I suppose.

MALTZ: Yes. You go back to the war films of World War II. Somebody's dying, and he's dying to stop fascism, to keep a country secure, to keep democracy and so on. So it's a different thing. It isn't the innocent run over and squashed by a steamroller.

So we didn't earn any money particularly. As a matter of fact, we didn't receive our royalties. We agreed to that to try to keep the play running. We got a little bit of money out of it. And then we sold the thing to films. At that time, since it wasn't a big success, we sold it for about \$10,000 to films, and at that time the producers got 50 percent, so I guess George and I had \$2,500, less agent's commission. But that was in the Depression, and that was a little money. And a little bit later--I'll take that up next time--we went out to Hollywood. But before we do, I'll

read a few of the reviews that we got on Merry Go Round a few little excerpts.

SECOND PART (August 19, 1976)

GARDNER: Now, we left off last time in the midst of the Merry Go Round.

MALTZ: Yes, now let me just stop and check. . . . [tape recorder turned off] There are some additional points that I thought of that I think are worth recording about Merry Go Round. First, when the script was copyrighted and when George Sklar and I sent it out to producers, I had a pseudonym on it. And the reason I had a pseudonym was that I read the play to my father after we both finished it, and he had come back from California and he got scared. My mother was frightened too, and he said, "Tammany Hall will kill me," because, since he was a builder and since anything he built or any building he maintained was subject to inspection, an administration that was angry at him could absolutely bankrupt him. Any building that he was building, they could say this is wrong and that's wrong, you can't proceed, and so on and so forth, and what are you going to do about it? You have to have their licenses or you can't function. That was why I put on a pseudonym. But as the time approached for a Broadway production, he had an internal struggle because he was also so very proud of having a son who was

going to have a play produced professionally, and finally his pride won over his anxiety. And so my own name was put on it. Otherwise, I was going right ahead with a pseudonym.

GARDNER: What was the pseudonym?

MALTZ: Oh, you know, I was trying to think of the pseudonym when I made this note. Couldn't think of it and I didn't want to go to my bank vault where I have my copyrights and find the original copyright. But as I began to tell this to you, it jumped to my mind--Eric Trent. And why I said Eric Trent, I don't know. I later had occasion to use some pseudonyms beginning in the sixties, and I'll come to that later.

Now, I didn't mention something interesting . . . just one second. . .[tape recorder turned off] We had twelve offers to move Merry Go Round uptown after the opening at the Provincetown, and we took the offer made from a theater that was owned by the Leblang Agency. That was a marvelous thing, I don't believe it exists anymore. It was an agency which would sell tickets at cut-rate, frequently as much as 50 percent below the box office price, with the agreement of the given theater. And what would happen was that if a play was running and it was beginning to lose its audiences and was running downhill, they would give their tickets to Leblang, where a lot of people

seeking cheaper seats would go on a given day to buy tickets. And by an influx of a lot more people who had bought cheaper tickets, the theater would be able to keep its play running. I know that in those years I always went to try and get tickets at Leblang to go into a theater. And the reason why we took that theater was that we were opening now in April, I believe, and since there was no air cooling in theaters at that time, most plays, or all plays, had to shut up for the summer. They just couldn't continue playing because audiences couldn't stand the heat inside of a theater. And then some would reopen in the fall if they were big successes, but those which had not been big successes probably would never open again. And having the Leblang Agency for a play was a way of giving us greater strength.

Two days after we took the offer of the Leblang Agency, they called us and said that they had decided not to take our play. They reversed. And we then called each one of the eleven other theaters in turn and all of them said that they had reversed. It was then that we began to realize that something was afoot. Fortunately, one of them--no, eleven of them, eleven of the twelve reversed--but the final one, which was a very good house on Forty-fifth Street, took us.

Merry Go Round sold as a film, for at the time, the not large but not insignificant sum of \$10,000, and under the rules of the time half of that went to the producers.

So that after payment of agent's commission, George and I each had about \$2,250, which was a very nice little sum for that period, if you consider that people got. . . . Let's say the Actors Equity minimum at that time was \$40 a week for an actor; you divide \$40 into \$2,250, and that was a considerable amount of living. It was made into a film called Afraid to Talk, and it was a poorly made film and never made any stir of any sort.

GARDNER: Do you want to go into your Hollywood experiences?

MALTZ: I'm going to go into that when I finish Merry Go Round, yes. We were not involved in the film Afraid to Talk.

GARDNER: I thought you were.

MALTZ: No, we were not. We just sold it and somebody else did the screenplay.

GARDNER: I see.

MALTZ: Now, there was a very funny incident when Merry Go Round was optioned by someone in Chicago to make a production. He did have a production; we don't know what kind it was, we never saw it. We didn't know anything about the guy, but it was professionally done, and we gathered that he must have had contacts with political people. We know that he invited the mayor and a good many others in the top circles of the municipal ruling group in Chicago to come to the opening night. And as they sat and watched this play unfold, one by one they got up and left the theater. [laughter]

It was an absolute disaster for the producer because this was a play, you know, that was just throwing water on them, or mud on them. Really crazy. I don't know whether the producer never saw the play, you know, just put up money for it, or what. Merry Go Round was never done after that anywhere until in the fifties, when it was done in the Deutsches Theater in East Germany in Berlin.

The Deutsches Theater was a theater on a very high professional level. Its director was a man whose name I knew, Wolfgang Langoff, who died a few years ago. Because around 1935 or '36, a book appeared in the United States by an actor who had been in a concentration camp for about a year in Germany and then was released by the Nazis. He made his way, I think, to Sweden, and that book, which I read at that time, was by Wolfgang Langoff. He apparently was in Sweden during the war years and then he returned, and I guess he was a convinced Communist. He went to East Germany and established this theater, and he was a very good theater man because I saw a filmed version. In East Germany they've had the practice of filming.

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AUGUST 19, 1976

GARDNER: You'd begun to talk about the East German film industry.

MALTZ: Yes, I interrupted myself and I'll go back and say that I did see a film version of the production that Langoff did of Merry Go Round, and it was a very well-directed play. In East Germany there is the practice--or there was, if it doesn't continue--of filming a stage play just as it is and then just showing it. I find it quite satisfactory. I don't know whether it has ever been attempted in the United States, but I also saw in that theater The Diary of Anne Frank, which happened to be playing in 1959 when I was in East Germany, and with the daughter of some dear friends playing the lead role (some friends I had known in Mexico). He was a very fine theater man, so that this was a most interesting experience to encounter this man first in a book and then as a director of this play.

GARDNER: As long as you introduced that aside, let me ask you a couple of questions. Do you think that there is any connection between the fact that the German expressionist theater, which really--Brecht went back to East Germany after World War II and so on--is such a filmic medium? There's so much embellishment in the expressionist theater

that adapts well to film. I think particularly of The Threepenny Opera, which can be filmed really as a stage play without losing anything. Do you think that that might have something to do with the fact that they film theater?

MALTZ: No, I wouldn't think so. I would just think that as a practical matter someone said, "Shucks, why don't we just film this play? We like it when we sit in a theater, why wouldn't people like it when they watched it?" And it's not unknown in the whole world. I believe that Laurence Olivier's Othello was filmed in that manner. I think various performances of Marcel Marceau have been filmed. (He's a friend that I want to talk about later. Help me remember if I forget.) But I don't know if it's done extensively except there, and actually I don't know how extensively it is done. I just know that they do do it. And in the case of Merry Go Round, there was nothing expressionistic about it. It was a realistic play, realistic melodrama. That was it.

Something that I want to mention is that in New York in the year 1932, when Merry Go Round went on, there were 166 legitimate theaters, and there were an equivalent number of play producers looking for plays. I think that in New York now, theaters, meaning both in the Broadway area and off Broadway, number about forty, so that's a little

less than one-fourth. All of this is of considerable cultural implication for the United States in the field of drama. Quite recently Brooks Atkinson delivered an address here. He's in his eighties, a man who has loved theater, and he said something that was a little odd within an otherwise very interesting talk, at least as reported in the press. He said this is a time of great events and yet there aren't the playwrights; the playwrights haven't come forward in a way you'd expect for a time like this. What he was forgetting to weigh was that writers are not going to turn to writing for the theater if they have no opportunity of having their work played. And nowadays on Broadway, if you are trying for Broadway, if you want to try and make a living, let's say, you have to decide to write a comedy with one set, with about six or seven characters at most. Otherwise you have written a play that no producer will even weigh. Because the producers either want British successes or a comedy of the type I described or something from an already established playwright like Williams or Albee or Miller. The costs have become so prohibitive that they cannot do what was done in the American theater in the more golden years of the twenties and thirties and forties and fifties. And we will see, comparatively speaking, the extinction of American drama if this is somehow not changed. Now, there has been a growth of regional theaters, like

the Mark Taper in Los Angeles, and these will help keep alive the desire to write plays. But I know that I myself. . . . For instance, although I turned to fiction after 1935, I did have an idea for a play I wanted very much to write in the late fifties and I wrote it, it has never been produced. It's a play called Monsieur Victor: it's about Victor Hugo. But there was a reason for me to write it even in the late fifties. Although the number of theaters was smaller than in the early thirties, there was still reason to think that if I wrote a play that was good, et cetera, it might get on. I would never write a play now, not at all. Unless, perhaps, I had been commissioned by a theater, by the Mark Taper, I would consider it a waste of time. Similarly, I am sure there simply cannot be the wealth of excellent short-story writers, or writers of excellent short stories who later went on to become novelists of distinction, today as there were in the thirties, because the number of magazines that will print an adult short story has dwindled enormously.

And this just means that nobody can write in a vacuum. I don't know how many people, to give an exaggerated illustration, how many writers would write if they were cast on a desert island, were alone, and knew that their work would never be read by anyone. I don't think anybody would write, really, unless it formed a way of keeping sanity perhaps. When you write, you want people to read or see

what you've done. And if the opportunities close down, as they have for economic reasons in the United States, you begin to lose the richness that you had in two previous forms. And now to finish off with Merry Go Round I'll read . . .

GARDNER: Can I ask a question to sort of conclude that thought?

MALTZ: Yes.

GARDNER: Are more young writers, then, channeled into film? I think that's the next question to ask. Where else can they be channeled?

MALTZ: Oh, I think you now find many more writers who are looking, who are beginning--many more writers whose aim as writers is to write for TV or film . . .

GARDNER: Since that's the only available market.

MALTZ: . . . since those become some of the prime markets. But this type of writer frequently today is more ambitious than film writers, let's say, in the forties were. Because things have changed in films also and the writer hopes to be not just the writer, but the director and perhaps the producer as well--in short, to have complete control of his material from conception to final film: to be an auteur as Ingmar Bergman is of the Europeans or as a Francis Ford Coppola is. And this is something new and something, I think, highly desirable, highly creative, that

has been added to the cultural scene in the United States.

I have the reviews of Merry Go Round and what I'll do is to read some small excerpts from a number of the reviews to give as balanced a sense as I can of them. The first review is from Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times. It says, "Despite its incidental crudities of workmanship, Merry Go Round, which was acted in the Provincetown last evening, is an exciting political melodrama chiefly because of its local resemblances. . . . Neither the playwright or the production is of superior qualities. If the play comes uptown, both may improve. But the pertinent nature of the material and the vigor of the story make Merry Go Round an experience in the theater." John Anderson, New York Journal: "It is a play of blunt attack and ferocious intent, and its blemishes do not damage the fury of its accusation. It makes its points and makes them relentlessly, and it plainly fascinated an audience jammed into the Macdougall Street stable to its last breathing space. I found it engrossing." (The reason why he says "Macdougall Street stable" is that I remember now that the Provincetown theater was once a stable before it was converted into a theater.) Richard Lockridge, in the New York Sun, April 12, 1932 (and that must have been the date of all the other reviews): "A play with the bite like an angry bulldog's was unleashed at the Provincetown Playhouse last evening. It hides behind

a fairly innocuous title, Merry Go Round, but there is no frolic in the scenes through which Albert Maltz and George Sklar, the authors, throw their whole weight against corruption and brutality. No light music plays them on as they tell the story of an insignificant bellhop who got in the way of a machine and was run over." And then finally, Robert Garland in the New York Telegram: "All in all Merry Go Round is bitter, brave, and as good an antidote as any for the spring fever from which the theater is suffering. I heartily recommend it but not to policemen, children, or the tenderhearted." Now, that's a sufficient cross section I would think. It will be a guide for the future and other reviews that I give.

In July George Sklar and I went out to Los Angeles because we had been offered a contract for three months by Paramount Pictures and. . . .

GARDNER: Did they solicit you or did you. . . ?

MALTZ: No, they solicited us. They were not the studio that had bought Merry Go Round; that was bought by Universal. But we wanted to earn the money. The money at that time was \$300 for the both of us, which, after a \$30 commission was taken off by the agent, meant that we each were getting \$135 a week. Well, that was a lot of money at that time, and I remember that I didn't have a bank account or make a checking account that I can recall out in Los Angeles.

Maybe I did. I know my father wanted me to send the first check back to him, because he wanted to frame it, he was so proud of the fact that his son was earning some money already. (I haven't mentioned that we didn't finish our semester at Yale; we didn't go back for classes anymore.) And so we arrived in Los Angeles and came out with the man, Walter Hart, who had directed Merry Go Round and who also got a contract at Paramount. His was a contract to continue if they liked his work; ours was not, because we didn't want to continue on as film writers. We wanted to come back and write plays. And we were put on what might seem to have been an interesting assignment, and that was a novel by Dashiell Hammett called The Glass Key. Now, in fact, it was not a good assignment at all. I don't know how it is with every one of Hammett's books--for instance, The Maltese Falcon might be better worked out, I think perhaps it is--but I know that I had occasion to once be asked to dramatize another one of Hammett's books (I forget the title of it), and I found there the same problems that I found with The Glass Key, and George found: namely, that his books are immensely readable and the suspense that he builds is such that it keeps one's attention reading rapidly, but if you have to pause and examine what literally happens in certain scenes, and make it real visually on the screen, it is just about impossible to realize because it's phony. His books are

full of highly readable phony elements which do not stand up under a moment's reflection.

GARDNER: For example, do you recall. . . ?

MALTZ: No, I don't recall any examples. I would have to get the book, and then I could pick it out from page after page after page. But if I can try and think up an example. Let's say . . . he would write by saying Sam Spade was in a taxicab and he was looking at his notebook when there was a sudden screeching of brakes, and the next thing he knew he was on the sidewalk, and he looked up with blood running out of his mouth and saw that the cab had hit another one. He had apparently flown through the open window and landed on his face. He pulled a loose tooth out of his mouth, looked at it and threw it down the sewer, stuffed a corner of a handkerchief between his lips, and went on the next several blocks to his office. He uncorked a bottle of rye and drank until the pain no longer bothered him, and suddenly a voice said, "Put 'em up, so-and-so." And you start to say, you know, how'd the guy get in the door? What did he do about the tooth by next day? I don't know, I'm not giving a good illustration. . . .

GARDNER: I get the idea.

MALTZ: But I can just tell you that when you had to dramatize it, and you had to provide a visual picture, you couldn't do it. We spent weeks on this thing and finally I

think after about six weeks, we gave it up. And then afterwards we wrote an original story which Paramount wasn't interested in, and there's an interesting little footnote about it.

The studio probably hired us because someone said, "Here are a couple of young hotshots, got a lot of talent," so the studio executives probably decided, "Oh, we're not going to lay our tired hands on them. We want their unspoiled talent to be fresh," and so on and so forth. So they put us in an office and nobody knocked on our door to say, "Hey, you know, should we talk about film writing a little bit?" If we had been working with a producer or director who might have given us a little guidance, we might have done better for them. But they had some idea of their own about leaving us alone, and leave us alone they did. At the end of three months we came back home with great pleasure. However, I will say that it was my introduction to what I call the great pleasures of the better aspects of Los Angeles living--the marvelous weather and so on. We had no contact with film circles, met a few people at the studios: one man, Lester Cole, whom I came to know much better later on, and another man, who had been a manager of wrestlers, told very funny stories about wrestlers. His name was Oscar Serlin. He subsequently went on to produce Life with Father, and having made an enormous amount of

money with that, he then retired from all production of all sorts. What he did with his life, I don't know. But I don't think he ever did another play. And that was about all.

During that summer I was making notes for a novel that I thought I might want to write someday, and aside from the notes, I had a title and, with it, there's a little story. The title of my novel was Bury the Dead. And about 1934, I guess, or '35, after Irwin Shaw's--oh no, before Irwin Shaw's play of the same title had come out, my friend George invited me to take a walk with him and, with considerable tension, said he had something to tell me. It was that a young playwright had come to him with a long one-act play, and he had found a lot of good stuff in it and made some suggestions for rewriting. But then had said, "You ought to change the title. The title is terrible." The title was Bury Them, They Stink. And this young man said, "Well, have you got any ideas?" George said, "Why don't you call it Bury the Dead?" And the young man said, "That's a fine title." And then George said, "His name is Irwin Shaw, and the play is going to be produced" (I forget by whom), "and gee, I gave away your title." And I said, "Well, I probably am not going to write the novel anyway, so you haven't done me any great harm. And don't worry about it."

GARDNER: Was the novel the same sort of thing, an antiwar. . . ?

MALTZ: No, the novel was a family novel. [It] had to do with my family.

GARDNER: Oh, how interesting.

MALTZ: Yes, it was just a very personal novel.

There were a number of interesting things that happened on our way back from Los Angeles, which of course in those days meant train travel. And actually, it was four nights and three days in a non-air-conditioned train. During this period I was reading the New Masses; I'm sure I read the Nation, the New Republic; I'm sure I had begun to read various Marxist pamphlets. George and I were always talking about events in the world and world politics, and I was moving leftward in my thinking. And so having read . . . yes, I guess it must have been in the Daily Worker . . . no, it might have been at that time the Nation or the New Republic . . . about what was going on in the building of Boulder Dam near Las Vegas, [Nevada], we decided to stop off there and take a look at it. Now, at that time (this is September--no, early October '32) Las Vegas didn't have any of the hotels that it now has. It was a small Nevada town with perhaps all dirt streets. I remember there was one street where there was a row of cribs, small little rooms with just about enough room for a cot and a way to move around it, with a woman standing in the doorway of each one,

inviting men in. It was open prostitution.

And in the town at that moment, sleeping out of doors since it was still warm, were about 10,000 men waiting to get work at Boulder Dam, which was about, I think, twenty miles away or twelve miles away, something close. The reason why they were there is that word had gone out all over the country that Boulder Dam was hiring. It was a very big project run by seven companies; seven companies were involved in the building of that dam. [sound interference-- tape recorder turned off] Boulder Dam was being built by seven companies in association, and they had indeed sent word out throughout the country (I'm sure it was deliberate publicity), saying that they were hiring men at Boulder Dam. And so men from all over the country hopped freights, hitchhiked to try and get work. I'm going into this story and another one as a way of reminding any readers of this material in the future of just a few of the aspects of life in America in those days which impinged upon the consciousness of someone like myself. There was a reason why the seven companies enjoyed having 10,000 men in the town of Las Vegas waiting to get work, and the reason was that they wanted to keep their project a nonunion one. If they had a constant turnover of men (and they saw to it that they did), there was no opportunity for them to get organized.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: So what they would do is this: aside from men who were perhaps very skilled in certain kinds of crafts that they needed, they saw to it that everybody else they hired was hired for a certain specific job--for instance, the digging of one tunnel. And when that tunnel was dug, let's say it took several months or weeks or whatever, they would then say to those men, "You're fired, but stick around because we'll have some more work for you." Now, in general they never had any more work for them. They hired other men, and the men they had just fired stayed around the company boarding houses which they maintained, where they got a decent bunk, a bed in a barrack, and where (since we had a meal in one of them) [they had] adequate food, quite adequate I would say, but for which they had to pay a certain amount of money.

Now, there also were available gambling houses run by the company and whorehouses run by the company. Not only that, but when these men were fired, if they wanted their money they were given scrip, which was company money which was only acceptable in these company enterprises. Also there was a company store for the purchase of groceries and clothes and so on. And I know, because we spoke to some men, if they insisted that they wanted their money all in dollars because they wanted to leave, they couldn't get it. They wouldn't give it to them; they would give them a portion

in dollars, and if they wanted to make a fuss there was the chief of police, who was a company man, and on some trumped-up charge they would be in jail. And whom could they appeal to? To a company judge?

GARDNER: What was your access?

MALTZ: I'll tell you. So that here was a structured situation whereby the companies running the construction of the dam had the men who worked for them work considerably for free, because the money that they paid the men turned a corner and came back to the company in the form of payments for board and room, gambling, whores, and so on. And also by their hiring and firing practices, they prevented organizers from ever building unions there. The men weren't there long enough. Actually, the only organizers that I think were there were some Wobblies. I met one man selling a Wobbly paper and he was just in jail every other day; they hauled him in and let him out, hauled him in and let him out. There wasn't much he could do. I might say that some years later, when I was teaching in Boulder, Colorado, at a writers conference at the University of Colorado, one of the students there had worked in the clerical office at Boulder Dam during the building of the dam, and she verified what at that time had been revealed in one of the papers I had read--that is, either the Nation or New Republic or Daily Worker, whatever it was: that there were a great many accidents and deaths

in the building of the dam. [There] probably are some in every dam; you can't help it. But these were all written down as pneumonia in order to avoid any hue and cry, in order to avoid possible suits and workmen's compensation and so on.

Now, when we went there, we just went by bus. It was not a closed area because men would come and ask for work. The area itself was not like a plant which is rigged with fences where you show a pass to get in. And we fell to talking. I think perhaps the first man we talked with was the Wobbly organizer, seller of the Wobbly paper. Within, I think, an hour or less of the time that we stepped into the town. . . . Oh, I forgot, we also wanted to ask about a disaster we'd read about. Apparently one of the barracks had been in such a position that a large boulder had crashed down from the mountainside, gone through the roof of the barracks, and killed several men. And the barracks had been ordered by government inspectors to be shut, but we understood that they were still using them. And so we made an inquiry about that. Within an hour or less after we came into the town, the chief of police came up to us and wanted to know what bus we were leaving on that day. "Because," he said, "if you're not out of here by night, you are going to be in jail." Just like that.

GARDNER: Just like in the movies.

MALTZ: Yes. And we said, "Well, we're going out on the so-and-so bus," and he said, "You be on it." And we were. Of course, we could observe that men were working in very difficult conditions, but those could not be helped; that is to say, there was nothing that could be done really about clouds of dust where there was drilling, or the hot sun of October at that time. That would have been present in any instance. And men dangling from ropes as they drilled in the sides of cliffs were doing dangerous work, but that had nothing to do with everything else we learned there and in Las Vegas about the general way in which the company operated, which I have already described. I think I would add that at that time in Las Vegas, or at the time we were there, some bootleg whiskey had been sold which affected the nervous systems of men, so that innumerable men were walking in the strangest fashion: some with their bodies way over on one side, some with their bodies leaning back, some with their bodies leaning forward. How long that had gone on, how long it lasted, we never knew. But it was there for us to visually observe.

Now, the type of brutal and conscious exploitation of workingmen that existed in that dam project, and which we knew was duplicated in a thousand ways in other enterprises over the United States, fed the ideas that we were beginning to have that socialism as we read of it would be a much

more humane system under which people could live and work. We stopped off in Chicago to see a friend of mine, a particular friend of mine who had been at the drama school, Paul Scofield (I mentioned him).

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: And just at that time there was an immense funeral march. (I don't remember how many people, I just remember visually how large it was. George, whom I asked the other day about it, said that there were 100,000 people marching, which seems to me larger than I would have expected, but let's say it was only 50,000--still a lot of people.) They were marching because there had been the following incident: a family had been evicted for nonpayment of rent. The local Unemployed Council had gathered and taken the furniture off the sidewalk and put it back into the apartment. The police had come, and the members of the Unemployed Council had prevented the police from evicting the people again. (Or maybe it had been that they never put their furniture out in the first place because the people were there. It's the same thing.) And one man was shot by the police and died. I might give a little background to that.

There were a number of different organizations of the unemployed, the two most important were those led by the Socialists and those led by the Communists. I think the Socialist one was the Workers Alliance and the one led by

the Communist party was the Unemployed Councils, and that was by far the largest organization. The Communist party was much more successful than the Socialists in organizing unemployed in the United States and in conducting demonstrations.

Now, conditions were such that there was a naked clash between the needs of people to have minimal shelter and the needs of landlords to get rent paid. The election of Roosevelt did not occur until the fall of '32, later than this, and under Hoover there were no means that I can recall provided by government, local or federal, for the assistance of a family where the father became unemployed, where he could not find other work, and where presently he was unable to pay the rent. The landlord had his own needs. He was not necessarily a wealthy landlord like Trinity Church in New York. He might have been quite a small landlord who depended upon the rents of one apartment house for his own livelihood, and he couldn't have a nonpaying tenant. But when he had the police come and put the tenants' furniture on the street, and there was a family with children and his furniture on the street, you had a human condition which was dreadful. And into that situation stepped force: the force of the police, on the one hand--the force of the law, enforcing property rights--and the force of the mobilization of bare-handed people by the Unemployed Councils on behalf of the elementary

human needs of the people who had been evicted. It was the same as the penny sales of farm properties. I don't know if I mentioned them last time, did I?

GARDNER: No.

MALTZ: Well, I will again because of what happened in my own life. But I think it's worth mentioning now that there were comparable situations all over the United States in farming areas. A farmer would find that prices had fallen so disastrously that he could not sell crops or cattle for a sufficient sum to pay his debts. Or there would be drought, as there was terribly in '34 and '35. And not being able to pay the mortgage on his farm, the farm would be repossessed, usually by a bank or a finance company. And farmers who might have worked the land many, many years, and who were good farmers, and hardworking, would find their farm and all its implements taken from them. And as this happened a sufficient number of times, local farmers, farmers who had voted Republican all along and are still voting Republican today, gathered--some with pitchforks and some with axes and some with weapons--and when the auctioneer came to auction off the property, which frequently happened, and its implements, there would be anywhere from 200 to 500 to 1,000 farmers. And even if they had 10, 20, 30 or 40 deputies, if you have 40 deputies, however well armed, and 1,000 really angry and determined farmers, the deputies aren't

going to do anything when the farmers buy a tractor for one penny. Which is what they did: they would buy the whole farm and all of the implements for a dollar and give them back to their neighbor, the farmer. And that was the way in which force and right on one side were confronted by force and right on another.

And so George and I walked alongside on the sidewalk, watching this demonstration, which took hours to pass a given point because of the multitude. And it is a tremendously impressive thing to find that number of people not in a holiday mood, serious, grim, walking behind a corpse with signs indicating certain slogans and certain chants which they had, and the significance of it was very deeply impressive. I think I just want to pause for a moment to check what this tape sounds like. [tape recorder turned off]

When George Sklar and I returned to New York, we each got a separate room in a rather old apartment house at 50 Commerce Street, which is a little street kind of hidden away in Greenwich Village. We chose that street and building because it happened to have the rooms available, and that was where Michael Blankfort and his wife Laurie lived. Blankfort had been the producer of Merry Go Round.

We immediately set to work on our second play, Peace on Earth, the idea for which we had conceived and talked about in general while we were in Los Angeles, and

had decided to write. At that time, we established contact with those individuals who had started talking about the creation of a theater that would deal with people in their social contexts, a theater, let's say, of social significance and which was later to be called the Theatre Union. A contact had already been made between the leading spirit in this theater venture, whose name was Charles Rumford Walker, and my friend George. Before we went out to Los Angeles, Walker had met George in the office of an agent and had immediately begun to talk with him about this project which he and a number of others had. And George was keenly interested in it and told me about it. George and Walker exchanged some letters during the summer. And when we returned in October, we made contact with them and very shortly afterwards began to meet with them. I'll wait to say more about the Theatre Union until I come to discuss it more fully.

At that time, while working on Peace on Earth, we were living, as were all Americans (some more sensitive to it than others, of course), in an atmosphere which I have already begun to describe by speaking of Boulder Dam and the funeral march in Chicago, but which I want to go into a little more fully. Violence by what we could call the Establishment was constantly manifest in the United States at that time. For instance, it was, I think, in that fall

of '32 that there was a considerable demonstration, perhaps by the Unemployed Councils, I'm not sure, in front of the Ford Motor Company asking for jobs. Five men were shot dead by the police; others were wounded. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 19, 1976

MALTZ: I don't remember exactly when a large textile strike occurred in Gastonia, North Carolina, but the public relations person for the union when it took place--it might have been in 1931--was a New Mexican woman, Margaret Larkin, who later became my wife. And while she was there, she narrowly escaped a lynching, and the leader of the union, or one of the leaders of the union, who was a folksinger singing her own songs about the union, a woman called Ella May Wiggin, was shot dead while driving in a truck back from a union meeting. These are merely two examples of hundreds and hundreds that occurred at that time, one of the most celebrated being the violence that occurred--not celebrated, the most notorious--the violence that occurred in Harlan, Kentucky, at a coal miners' strike, where the miners also had weapons since they were Kentucky mountaineers. [It was] a violence, however, which was much greater on the side of the employers, where national guardsmen were brought in, I believe, and where a delegation of eastern intellectuals headed by Theodore Dreiser went down to investigate what had happened and were put in jail. (Dreiser later went on trial, and there was an attempt to stain his character in the public eye by saying that he had had a prostitute in

his hotel room while down there. And Dreiser refuted that by saying, "I didn't because I can't.")

However, in addition to this violence, there were all the pitiful signs of misery everywhere. For instance, all along Riverside Drive in New York City, which was a long area of many blocks and considerable width, and alongside of which I had walked when I was a student, all down there wooden shacks, improvised by the men with a hammer and a few nails, with tar-paper roofs or roofs of corrugated iron, whatever they could get, sprang up, and some thousands of men lived there. They had no place else to go. And [they] fed themselves by panhandling, or perhaps they were among the apple sellers, or they went down to various missions for one meal a day.

In the year . . . when did I write. . . ? I think it was as late as the year 1936, in the summer or in the early fall, I was walking near Wanamaker's department store, which was, I think, around Tenth Street and Third Avenue in New York City. There was one whole street in which the sidewalks, which are quite wide there (I think because of the department store), had a carpet of men--one man next to another, just sleeping. You couldn't walk on the sidewalk. They were asleep, usually with some newspapers under them and perhaps newspapers above them. This was the period in which one of the most celebrated songs was "Brother, Can You

Spare a Dime?", sung by a man who . . . the lyrics saying: once I was an engineer, once I was this, once I was that-- brother can you spare a dime?

I have in front of me a volume put out by Time-Life Books, part of a series called This Fabulous Century, and in a section called "Hard Times," which has photographs of migrant workers, it has a quotation from a migratory worker's logbook. And it reads the following:

"October-December 1932: Cut Malaga and muscat grapes near Fresno. About \$40 a month. December 1932: Left for Imperial Valley, Calif. February 1933: Picked peas, Imperial Valley. Earned \$30 for season. On account of weather, was fortunate to break even. March-April 1933: Left for Chicago. Returned to California. May 1933: Odd jobs on lawns and radios at Fresno. June 1933: Picked figs near Fresno. Earned \$50 in two months.

Now, living was cheaper then, but fifty dollars for two months would not have kept a family, or a single man, for that matter. They have a picture of a very broken-down Ford automobile, with some mattresses on the top, with pails and a kitchen table, and a large seeming garbage can attached to the back, and the car is just waiting at the side of the road. The caption says, "Yessir, we're starved, stalled and stranded."

Well, when I was driving around the country in 1934, there was more than once when I stopped (because I had purchased, after running into this experience, a rubber tube)

where there was a car that was stalled like that, that was perhaps trying to go to California. And this might be in Iowa, it might be in Arkansas, and the family had no money for gasoline. They would stand and wait for a car to come along and stop as I did and siphon out a couple of gallons of gasoline into their tank and drive on until the gas ran out and then wait for another tank, another car, to come along. And this was the way they made it across the country.

Here there's a quotation from a debt-ridden farmer:

"If they come to take my farm, I'm going to fight. I'd rather be killed outright than die by starvation. But before I die, I'm going to set fire to my crops, I'm going to burn my house, I'm going to p'izen my cattle." They have a portrait of two miserable-looking children, barefooted, in dirty little smocks, one with dirt all over her face and hands and feet (she's gotten into a coal scuttle or something). The room is papered with old newspapers and the caption is: "The daughters of a WPA worker and a sick mother are left home unattended." A bitter father said, "A worker's got no right to have kids any more." Now, they are already talking here about the WPA, which means it was under Roosevelt when the Works Progress Administration was established in order to help people. And it did help people. They were much better off than they were under Hoover. But still, with two children, and both parents working, they had no one

to help with the children. Now, I don't want to go on any longer. I think these illustrations are sufficient to give a tiny indication of a country and a people in great trouble.

It was against this background that one needs to understand the radicalization of a great many people. Here is one example of it. The presidential election was on when we returned from Los Angeles in October '32. The Communist party was running for its candidate a former trade-union organizer by the name of William Z. Foster, who was rather well known because, among other things, he had led the great steel strike of 1919. He was a man with a very important labor history behind him who had joined the Communist party some years before and had become its secretary. It was running as vice-president a man called [James W.] Ford, and he was a black man. Now, this in itself was very striking because what party in the United States had ever run a black man for vice-president? It was something which was a token of the best side of the communist movement at that time: namely, that it took a position, and a very firm one, against discrimination of any kind and for the equality of all peoples. Not only that but it had the principle and the, let's say, courage to nominate a black man for vice-president. This brought a very interesting response.

I want to quote from a book called The Long View from the Left by Al Richmond. He says:

In 1932 the list of intellectuals who endorsed the Communist presidential ticket, William Z. Foster and James W. Ford, resembled a who's who in American arts and letters. . . .

(I'll interpolate by saying unfortunately he does not give the whole who's who. That list exists somewhere. I've seen it and I think I probably have it in my own library. But I've been unable to locate it in these days, and anybody who wants to find it would be able to research it.) But going on from the quotation:

. . . The committee of intellectuals for Foster and Ford staged a public meeting at Cooper Union, attracting 2000 persons who jammed the hall, and an estimated 2500 who were turned away. The program was structured to present the viewpoints of several disciplines. . . . Sidney Hook performed a philosopher's chore; he was chairman. . . .

Now, if someone reads this twenty years from now they may not know that Sidney Hook, professor of philosophy for many years at NYU and now of Stanford, was one of the most prominent, articulate, active, cerebral anti-Communists from at least 1936 or '37 right on to the present, which is 1976. But here he was chairman of the Foster-Ford meeting in the fall of October '32.

. . . Malcolm Cowley presented the viewpoint of the critic; James Rorty, of the poet; Hugo Gellert, of the graphic artist; John Herman, of the novelist; Eugene Gordon, of the black writer. Waldo Frank also spoke but I forget whether he doubled in some category or had one of his own. . . .

That's the end of the quotation from Richmond.

I do know that one of the others who endorsed the Foster-Ford platform candidacy was Edmund Wilson, and Edmund Wilson at that time was writing in the New Republic and saying, "I'm a Marxist." Now, if we add, let's say, some hundreds of names or a hundred other names to this list, then you begin to get a sample of the temper of the time, and how many people at that time must have thought that there was a great humane promise in the leadership of the Communist party and naturally attached to it what was going on in the Soviet Union!

For myself, this period, during which I was at work with my collaborator on a play, was a period of intensive reading in Marxist literature. One of the earliest books I read, a rather short book, was Friedrich Engels's Socialism: Utopian and Scientific. And for a reason that I'll explain, I was especially impressed with it. The reason is this: I would say that probably at least 50 percent of my reading of philosophy at college had to do with what's called "the problem of knowledge" or epistemology. And this was a question that philosophers wrestled with from . . . oh, I guess . . . I don't remember now whether ancient philosophers, or I'd say the Greek philosophers, wrestled with it quite as much as later philosophers beginning with Hume and Locke and others--Spencer, Bradley. But it was

broadly the question of whether or not, with the senses that we have of vision, hearing, touch, taste and so on, we really get a true measure of the world; or whether, as it sifts through our senses--the sensations come through our senses to our brains--it is, let's say, refracted, as the angle of a stick may be when it's thrust into water, and that what we get is only a partial image and a distorted image of reality. Or to give another example, one could have a dream so vivid that one wakes up screaming, and yet it was nothing but a dream. So how do we know (went the extreme argument) that what we think is reality is any more than a dream we are having in our own heads?

Now, philosopher after philosopher wrote books on this, wrestled with the problem. There was the famous phrase of the French philosopher Descartes, "I think therefore I am," which was his attempt in one phrase to sum up the validity of his reality. I remember something from Aquinas on the question of truth on which he had a little syllogism saying, There is no truth: therefore the proposition "there is no truth" is true, therefore there is truth. And so, very able minds struggled with this for centuries, and we who were studying the history of philosophy struggled with each philosopher in turn and learned what his thinking had been.

In this book by Engels he mentions the problem of epistemology, and he has a footnote and the footnote says:

man's practice had solved the problem before man's ingenuity had invented it. And it was such an intellectual shock of a delightful sort for me to read this and say, "Well, of course, that's true." When men had an idea that if they walked through a body of water they would drown, and built a bridge and safely crossed, their practice solved the problem long before some philosopher came along and said, "How do you know there's water there?" They had seen somebody drown, and they knew there was water there. And I said, well, to myself, why didn't some of the instructors of philosophy along the way make the observation: Look, this is what this philosopher was grappling with here in the eighteenth century, but, in fact, man's practice has solved the problem. The problem doesn't exist, and you can predict with science that you're going to set a fuse and that a certain building will go down with it; and if you think that maybe it's in your own mind, you get in that building if you distrust your sensations. And the fact that, just in passing, while writing a book on another subject, Engels had the intelligence and the brilliance to clear away this whole problem in one footnote was very impressive to me. It was an extraordinary credential for one of the classicists in Marxism, so far as I was concerned.

But there is something else about the classic literature in Marxism which was most impressive to me, and which

I think is most impressive today, and which influenced me very much, and subsequently, I would say, blinded me very much to what was going on in the Soviet Union, and it's this: if you just read the literature, it is, I think, the noblest body of literature ever penned by man, because it speaks of the abolition of every type of human exploitation. Its goals are the abolition of the exploitation of colonial countries by more developed or imperialist countries, the end of the exploitation of people of color, or of nonwhites by whites, which of course at the time, in the 1930s, when you still had the enormous empires of Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and others, you had tens of millions of people probably living under foreign domination. And it called certainly for an end to all ethnic discrimination in all countries. It called for an end to exploitation of women by men. In this respect, classic Marxist literature, and indeed the platform of the Communist party of the United States, anticipated the women's liberation thesis--not in all of its aspects, but in its fundamentals. Equal pay for equal work was a Communist party slogan back in the 1930s, 1920s. It speaks of the end of wage slavery, of wage exploitation as defined in communist economics. Its declared aims were those of human brotherhood on all levels, with mutual respect of all people for one another, and for freedom. Marx wrote, "Socialism is the kingdom of freedom." The fact that it has not turned out to

be the kingdom of freedom in the Soviet Union, but in so many ways precisely the opposite, is something I came to know, as others did, later. But in terms of the literature itself, its aspirations and its advocacy, it precisely appealed to all of the idealism that not only I as a young man had but millions of other young men and women [had] in all countries of the world. And this was the reason why, in all countries of the world, you had the growth of the communist movement, and of those in it or around it who followed its leadership. Turn off for a moment. [tape recorder turned off]

There was at this time as well a great deal of interest in what was going on in the Soviet Union. There had been all through the twenties a campaign of incredible slander toward the Soviet Union which found markets, I think, even in such newspapers as the New York Times. (It's noteworthy that the first book that brought Walter Lippmann to national attention was one done in collaboration, I believe, with another writer, and it was an exposé of the false stories on the Soviet Union, I believe--as a matter of fact, the false stories in the New York Times.) Because what would happen then, what would happen over the twenties, was that a reporter sitting in an office in Riga, in Latvia, and never going into Russia, the Soviet Union, would write up anything that came to his head, or anything that somebody told him.

For instance, widely accepted in the United States and,

I suppose, elsewhere in the world was that the advent of the communist government in Russia meant the nationalization of women. That was supposed to mean that any man could just take any woman sexually if he wanted to. And after about a decade of these stories, Lippmann's book exploded them, and apparently so demonstrably that I think he was subsequently hired by the New York Times. So that by around 1932, in addition to a continuing campaign of that sort which went on eternally in the Hearst press and in newspapers of that sort, there were also different stories being written about it. And in the meantime, people had traveled to the Soviet Union and some with reputations, such as Lincoln Steffens, came back to write about it. Steffens said, "I've seen the future and it works," a celebrated phrase of his. And other information came back: for instance, that there was free medical care, and that marriage and divorce were purely matters [to be decided by] the individuals involved, that they could marry if they wished, and they could divorce when they wished.

Well, this made a great impression on, let's say, free-thinking persons in the United States because the divorce laws were much stricter then than they are now. There were many people who were caught in miserable marriages who would like to have been out of them, but there was no way, say, in New York state in which you could get a divorce short of,

I don't know, being in prison like my uncle (my aunt was able to get a divorce). There were a few other situations in which you could get a divorce, but in practically no other way. I think going to Reno, Nevada, still was something, but that was for a minority of people who could afford to go, and it was just that divorce was infinitely more difficult. So to find a country that said, "Look, marriage and divorce are matters of personal decision," was very impressive. The fact is, of course, later the Soviet Union changed somewhat and made divorce somewhat more difficult. But that was the effect then. It also made a great impression that abortions were free in the Soviet Union, something that we have come to here in a good many states, although many people object to it. But it was so then, and for women who had perhaps had abortions done under very brutalizing circumstances, this was a very meaningful thing. It seemed to indicate a society run by humane people.

At that time also, there were films that were very impressive that were coming out of the Soviet Union, since they had a number of filmmakers, led by Eisenstein, who were very innovative in the way they were doing films, so that just cinematically they were of profound interest. But in addition to that they had a humanism about them which was impressive. For instance, there was a film called, I think, Wild Boys of the Road [Road to Life], which was based upon a very important

problem that the Soviet Union had as a result of the years of war and civil war and starvation and disease: there were innumerable orphans. And the boys, many of them, gathered in bands in which the boys, by being in a band, they were supportive; each boy was supportive of others and received support. They turned into thieves, and they stole in order to survive. They were young thugs. (Since, I've read a book about it, and apparently the film was quite true to reality.) There was a most admirable teacher who conceived of a plan of handling these boys. They were rounded up by the police, and the story of the film was made of one particular group that he led at the beginning where they were put into a decent environment in the country and given the opportunity to work, and given food, and handled with a certain kind of understanding coupled with firmness. It was such a heartwarming study of the way in which one particular boy, the leader of the group, began to change in a different environment and with different handling, and what he turned into. And the film was enormously successful amongst intellectuals at that time. Everybody that one knew said, "Go see it. It's marvelous," and, "I've seen it twice or three times."

There were the classic films like Potemkin, on the fall of St. Petersburg, by Eisenstein, which were very exciting and in which one felt the excitement of those who had made

the revolution against tyranny. Who can ever forget the tremendous scene in Potemkin where the soldiers in white uniforms walk down the steps firing volley after volley at the civilians, some of whom are demonstrating and some of whom are just there, or the baby carriage with a baby in it, where the mother is shot and the carriage just keeps rolling down the steps in Odessa? And there were not a few other films like that. It was a period of very great film-making in the Soviet Union, and with great humanism, with profound humanism, in the films.

And all of this was part of what was calculated to affect me and others at this time when the situation in our own country seemed to be so lacking in hope. What the Soviet films brought was a message of hope. They didn't say, "Everything is fine here and we have no problems," but they said, "We're moving to a brighter future. And this is how we're moving and these are our values." Whereas one couldn't feel that about the United States, especially at this time before Roosevelt was elected. Once Roosevelt came in and got his programs started, a new hope did start in the United States. But this was still Hoover's time, the bleakest time. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off]

SECOND PART (August 26, 1976)

GARDNER: You mentioned that you wanted to go back and touch some points of your college days.

MALTZ: Yes. There was something fascinating each year at college and that was a debate between the Columbia College debating team, of which my roommate was a member for two years, and either Oxford or Cambridge students, since they came in alternate years. The Columbia University students, under the guidance of some professor, would prepare themselves on aspects of the topic that had been agreed upon beforehand. They would work for months researching it and writing their speeches, coordinating ideas, and seeing to it that their speeches weren't repetitive. And then, I think, almost invariably they would memorize their speeches so that they could deliver them in perfect style. The English students obviously had not memorized their speeches, and it made no difference whether they were from Oxford or Cambridge, they had clearly read in the subject and given it some thought. They spoke extemporaneously, and invariably each one of them was witty in a way that the Columbia students were not. It was always much more delightful to listen to them than to the Columbia students, and they were always awarded the winning side (a palm leaf, or whatever you call it) in the debates. This went on, I think, all four years

of my stay at college. I'm not so sure what all of the lessons are that could be drawn from that: perhaps that there is a superiority in the English school system as compared to the American; or perhaps not, because if we go into various fields of endeavor, I don't know whether per capita the endeavor of the English is that much better than the Americans'. And yet there's something there that made me want to put it down in this history.

For instance, I became good friends in Mexico with a Hungarian writer [Janos Szekely] whose pen name was John Pen. When we talked it was constantly obvious to me that the breadth of his knowledge as a graduate of a Hungarian university was far greater than mine. He knew more literature, and while that in itself could be, oh, partially explained by my concentration on philosophy, he knew more history. There were few fields in which I didn't feel that this man was just better educated than I. (I wanted to identify him before by his best-known work, published in English, and forgot it for the moment, but it is Temptation.) And this is just a passing observation on the fact that it is my general impression that if a serious student emerges from an American university, the cultural wealth that he has within himself is inferior to that of a graduate of many European universities. I'm thinking now of a Czech whom I know; I think the same was certainly true of him. How

it happens, I don't know.

Now, to move to another topic. . . . My span of life has been such that there have been vastly more changes since I was born than there would have been if I had been born, I think, at a similar time in the nineteenth century. Of course there's no way of knowing what the years ahead will bring. But when I was a boy in Brooklyn, the fire engines were still being drawn by horses, and this continued for not a few years. I don't remember exactly when fire engines became purely automobiles, fire trucks. One of the exciting things was to run down to the corner when we heard the fire engines coming out, since there was a fire station about five blocks away from my home, because there were Dalmatian dogs attached to the fire houses, and they used to run alongside of the horses. And it was just tremendously exciting to see this pounding of these powerful horses and the dogs running along beside them. When I was a boy, also, there were very heavy snows in Brooklyn (I don't know whether the climate is the same now, or the snowfall is the same; I have the impression it may be less), and frequently there was snow packed down on the streets for weeks at a time. And local merchants, such as butchers who had deliveries to make, would have horsedrawn sleds that would cover the entire area in order to make their deliveries. Now, perhaps that was due in part because the mechanism of clearing snow from

the streets was at that time vastly inferior. I don't believe there was any mechanical means whatsoever; it was just men with shovels. Probably that was a good part of it.

When I moved into the house I lived in when I was three years old, there was only gas lighting. Electricity did not come in, I think, for, oh, perhaps five, seven, eight years. There was no shower bath until about the time I went to high school. Before that there was only a bath. And as a matter of fact, it was in the high school, I recall, that an instructor urged us students to abandon the time-honored policy of bathing only once a week and to take a shower every day. And it was then for the first time that I began to shower. Previous to that it was normal for members of my family to take a bath once a week. On Friday afternoon it would be my turn, and I can remember how much dirt would accumulate between my toes with all the running around and playing I did, and not bathing. I don't know how often I changed my socks, as a matter of fact. Maybe that was only once a week too.

The automobile was then only in its early stages of development. The Model T came along when I was a boy. At that time there was not even a gas gauge on the front panel of a car. One had to keep a stick handy and constantly watch and go back to your gas tank and check, or else you'd stop

for lack of gas. The airplanes came in primarily with World War I, and it was during that time that I saw my first plane. Radio didn't come in for people until after World War I, and I remember the excitement I had when, I think, around 1920 or so my father bought a little radio, and I stayed up as late as I could at night because that was when you could get to hear out-of-town stations. I remember the excitement with which I heard something, I believe, in St. Louis. It was tremendously exciting. Such things as pro football, basketball, and hockey didn't exist when I was a child. Perhaps the most profound change, in one way, affecting the life of human beings occurred in the realm of attitudes toward sex.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 26, 1976

GARDNER: We left off in the middle of your sex education.

MALTZ: Yes. [laughter] I was saying that the attitudes of my parents would have been formed by the prevailing level of education and also the level of society at which they lived in the 1890s: that is to say, very clearly it was Victorian. I'm sure, for instance, that my father, entering marriage around . . . let me see . . . just a moment please . . . [tape recorder turned off] . . . entering marriage around 1900, had no understanding whatsoever of the sexual needs or sensitivities of his wife. The stress that I received--the only education I received then about sex was that any indulgence in it before marriage surely resulted in venereal disease. There was never any suggestion on my father's part that I could buy condoms and avoid that. There was certainly no other education of any sort. And I remember conversation with a friend at college in which he had a lovely fantasy. There was a sister college to Columbia, Barnard, only across a wide avenue, really, from some of our buildings, but as far different that it might have been in Chicago since there was really no contact between the two student groups. My friend's fantasy was that he would have the ability to go each night to a different room in the girls' dormitory at Barnard and lay a

different girl. Now, the extraordinary difference between that (and we're speaking now, say, of the year 1926) as compared to 1976, when there are dormitories in which both young men and women students live in many American universities, is of course an enormous one. And whatever else has not improved in, let's say, American life, or whatever burdens we have today of pollution that we didn't face fifty years ago in our natural environment, that is an enormous improvement, I would think, in human well-being.

Now, paralleling that, there is a very fascinating change in the literary field. I think I may have mentioned that when George Sklar and I wrote Merry Go Round (this being the year 1931 when we wrote it; it went on in '32), it was very important to us at one moment in the play to have someone call another "bastard." Did I mention that?

GARDNER: No.

MALTZ: Oh, well, it was a scene where it called for an epithet like that. But, to my best knowledge, the word bastard had never been uttered in that way in the American theater before that time, and it was part of our young rebellious spirits to fight for that right to have that word said. And there was uncertainty on the part of various people connected with the production, but it was said, and we got away with it. Now, on the other hand, around the year 1935, I think, I was down in Philadelphia to, oh, make a speech

on something or other in connection with a theater there, an amateur left-wing theater. That theater had done a production of a one-act play of mine, Private Hicks, before an audience consisting of union members and their wives. Now, Private Hicks probably had a few similar words in it, maybe a few damns and a few hells and so on, and the organizer of the union said to the head of the theater company that they didn't want them to come back. And the theater man said, "Well, what's wrong, didn't you like the play?" And he said, "Oh, yeah, it was a good play, but we didn't like the language in it." He said, "Well, what do you mean, the language?" He said, "Well . . ." and then he illustrated. And the theater man said, "Well, isn't that the way you fellows speak?" And he said, "Yeah, but when we're with our women, we don't want words like that spoken before them." Now, this was a problem that one faced culturally in the year 1935. Twelve years later, or eleven years later, in 1946, Little, Brown and Company had the opportunity to publish From Here to Eternity by Norman Mailer. The chief editor . . .

GARDNER: From Here to Eternity is James Jones.

MALTZ: Oh no--yes, I mean. . . . That's right, Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer . . . and the chief editor and vice-president of the firm which published me, and he was a friend of mine, wanted to publish the Mailer

book, but the head of the company wouldn't do it because Mailer used the word fug repeatedly in the text. And that was in itself a startling innovation: Mailer was really very creative in deciding on using the word fug. Oh, I've forgotten something earlier. I had to fight, but I succeeded in the fight, in having in my play Black Pit, which was produced in 1935, in showing a pregnant woman with the actual silhouette of pregnancy. That also had never been shown in the American theater before, to my knowledge, and for years afterwards it was never shown in films--a pregnant woman could not be shown. You are smiling at this, and properly [so].

GARDNER: It's incredible to me. And yet, I'm smiling because I'm thinking back and making connections and realizing it's true.

MALTZ: Yes, and you see that's one of the values of this kind of an oral history. Because you wouldn't think of it, but having experienced it, I know that it took place. As a matter of fact, when we come to a discussion of films, I really should have here the Hays Code as to the kinds of things you could and could not do.

While I'm at it, for instance, you could not all through the twenties and the thirties and the forties and, I believe, the fifties, and I don't know when it stopped, you could not show a husband and wife in the same bed: you had to have

twin beds. And so many of these changes occurred after World War II and increasingly as the years went into the fifties and sixties. This becomes all the more interesting when you contrast it with cultural attitudes in different countries. For instance, I was told in the thirties that German literature, which I don't read in the original, had all of the words that we were not allowed to have. I'd like to have that checked by someone, but I do know from an American who has been living in China since the late forties, and with whom I was in correspondence in the fifties, that in China at that time there was no word that was forbidden for anyone to say. Anyone of any age said any word that existed in the language. This is still different, say, in France, where there has been for years much greater license to use words but where certain words continue to be really too vulgar to be said. Apparently nothing is too vulgar to be said in China; but on the screen, at least in the fifties, a man and a woman could not kiss. So these cultural elements vary and change in different societies at different times, and we finally have come to, let's say, the word enlightenment that other countries reached long before us.

It was just last night that I picked up a magazine that I suppose I have read something in three or four times in my life, and that's McCall's magazine. I saw it near my wife's bed, and I saw that it had a couple of short stories

in it, and I wanted to read it. I was just flabbergasted to see the word fuck in McCall's magazine. Now, I don't know when it came into usage there, but not having seen it for a great many years, I would never have expected that it would be there. And so it is that language changes. And now turn a page and get to 1932. . . . [tape recorder turned off]

In the summer of 1932, while George Sklar and I were in Hollywood, the tremendously important Bonus Expeditionary Force march occurred in Washington. This was a gathering of thousands of World War I veterans in Washington asking that they be given a \$300 bonus each, which had been promised them for the year 1945 by some legislation that had already been passed. (Now, I'm not absolutely sure it was \$300. I think it was, I'm not quite sure, but I may be a little bit in error on that.) There certainly was organization of Right, Center, and Left behind the coming of these veterans to Washington, but they wouldn't have come if there hadn't been an enormous, spontaneous response on the part of individual veterans of all shades of political ideas, or of no political ideas, to the slogan of Give Us the Bonus Now. On June 7 some 7,000 veterans paraded in Washington. Now, if you realize that this was summer of '32, and, let's say, a good many of these men had been demobilized as veterans in, say, the summer of 1918, you've had fourteen years pass

during which a great many of them were members of the American Legion, which stood for everything patriotic and nationalist in the United States; and yet here in this economic crisis, many of them were workingmen without jobs, and farmers who had lost farms, and white-collar workers who had lost jobs, and they came to plead with their government for some money. The parade was not interfered with, but it was clear that the officials of the government, with the president then being Herbert Hoover, wanted them to go home after their parade.

But instead of going home, they began to build shacks in a nearby area called Anacostia Flats, next to the Anacostia River. They also got the use of a good many tents, and I don't know who supplied the tents. By the end of the week of June 7, 4,000 more veterans had poured into Washington. In mid-June, some of these veterans had moved into certain vacant sites near the city center, not too far from the Capitol and the White House.

Increasingly in those weeks, the press in general played a role of fomenting hysteria about the presence of these veterans in Washington. Increasingly they were called Reds. One banner headline said that dynamite had been seized at the Anacostia camp. Some vets coming in a boxcar through close-by Alexandria, Virginia, were declared to have been carrying arms, and it was asserted that they were disarmed. To my best knowledge, these headlines were fabrications,

and they were part of the right-wing, deeply reactionary attitudes of the publishers of most newspapers at that time.

And as a result of this campaign and of other factors, on July 28 cavalry and tanks under General MacArthur drove the bonus marchers out of Washington, with bayonets and gas grenades. Two babies died because of the gassing (since some families had come along with the ex-soldiers), and two of the men died by bullets fired by the police. This sent an enormous shock wave through the entire country, and was something that orators would always refer to throughout the thirties: these men had fought for their country, and yet this was how they were being treated. And it was events like this that helped radicalize me.

In the fall of that year, there was another such event. I have mentioned the Unemployed Councils which were led by Communists, but of course there would have been no one in them if the Communists who were leading them had been advocating policies that the people in them didn't like. I mention this, and perhaps I'll pause over it for a moment, because even people who pretend to be serious scholars have often accepted a kind of a myth about the communist movement: that somehow Communists conspire behind the scenes and thereby successfully influence people to do certain things. In a curious way this is the other side of the coin from the Hitler thesis that international Jewish bankers manipulated England

and France and the United States into doing certain things. How this manipulation occurred is explained in neither situation. It is just a myth.

As an excellent example of this myth, at lunch I was reading about a period through which I lived, but about events of which I remembered little because I hadn't participated in them, and that was the activities of the Theater Arts Committee in the Left theater in New York. It was enormously successful. It was a movement to do skits and songs and burlesque and review material before audiences in nightclubs, and it attracted a great many people in the theater at that time. Maybe later, when I come to discussing the thirties, I'll read the names of some of the people who were involved, because it is very interesting. But after the Soviet-Nazi pact of August 1939, when this group, which had been led by Communists, also supported the line of the Communist party, practically all of its membership fell away. It suddenly lost its ability to "manipulate" people, to cunningly make them follow its will. Obviously people don't go where they don't want to go. But if the abolitionists at a given period, or the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] at another period, or the Roosevelt New Deal at another period offers a program that people need, then they will follow it. And so now I come back to the leadership of the Communists in

the Unemployed Councils. Those unemployed by the many thousands who joined the councils would not have had anything to do with it if the leadership had been proposing slogans and programs that they didn't like. And in 1932, in the fall, there was a mobilization on the part of the Unemployed Councils to travel to Washington from all over the United States in order to present certain demands to the government for aid to the unemployed.

Now, it was called a march but in fact the men and women who went on it came in trucks. Of course, to go in a truck from California or Texas to Washington is no small matter. Sometimes I believe there were places en route in which homes were found where they could sleep through a night, perhaps have a bath, but often they were passing through alien territory or unfriendly territory, and there was no such opportunity. And so people slept in the trucks, and perhaps there were two drivers and they just drove day and night. I don't remember any longer, and I haven't been able to pause to research, find out how many thousands finally arrived in Washington, but there were hundreds of trucks and I would think. . . . Those who came were delegates from councils, each delegate representing 50, 25, 100, 200 people, I have no idea anymore. But I would think there probably were at least 1,500, 1,000, or 2,000 people who came; I don't think it was any more [than that]. There had been

a request on the part of the Unemployed Council in New York and several other eastern cities for professionals to go down to Washington in support of this hunger march, and I was one of a group that came down from New York.

When the trucks came together and the first trucks came along, they were directed by the Washington police in such a way that they ended up on what was called a viaduct. Now, I've looked up--it was an unfinished viaduct--I've looked that up and the word viaduct speaks of a crossing over a bridge. I don't remember whether this crossed over a bridge. I remember a very large expanse of concrete with kind of a steep hill on one side, very steep, and a rolling rise on the other, and I remember it more as a kind of an unfinished freeway. But in any instance, it was quite easy for the police, once having directed the trucks into this area, to then bottle them up so that there was no escape for them; they could not go forward or backward, and they couldn't drive to either side. And there they were kept. It was very cold. I remember at night that the police had bonfires--those in front and on the side, on the rolling side, had bonfires--and they stood around it, as a matter of fact, doing a good deal of drinking. The people were not able to make bonfires because there was no wood for them. In addition to the cold they had the fatigue of their rides, a good many of them for

very long distances. A lot of them suffered from a kind of truck sickness, which turned out, I think, pretty much to be constipation, because they hadn't been able to make regular stops. And although they were bottled up there, no sanitary facilities were provided for them. And as a result, when the women walked off into this rolling area, they were subjected to the jibes of policemen who were lined up there.

The action of the government and police in doing this was not wholly approved of by the newspapers. I remember at least one cartoon in one paper in which it showed a small group of people in their trucks and surrounding them on all sides, a ridiculous number of planes, tanks, soldiers, howitzers, machine guns, and so on. It made absurd what had been done for them. I remember having dinner one night at the home of Robert Allen, the columnist, political columnist, who was in fact the brother of Paul Peters, one of the playwrights who was a member of the Theatre Union, which I have yet to describe. And he was upset by the unnecessary cruelty and hysteria surrounding this event and was doing all he could with people in Congress whom he knew to try and get the situation changed. One tiny grace note, for those who may have read something by Edward Dahlberg: there was an office of the Unemployed Councils in Washington, and a number of us assembled there one day to do various things

in an effort to relieve the situation of the people in the viaduct. I know that I took on the task of writing a leaflet. I sat down at a typewriter (although that was not my normal way of writing), and after I had been there about a minute or two or three, I was rudely pushed away from the typewriter, physically pushed away by Dahlberg, who said, "You don't know how to write a leaflet." And although my immediate reaction was to clip him in the jaw for the way he had handled me--mishandled me--I didn't [laughter] because of the common purpose and the circumstances. Whether he wrote a satisfactory leaflet, I have no idea. But this is rather typical of our friend Dahlberg. [laughter]

There was one afternoon in which rather an extraordinary thing occurred. When it became clear that the hunger marchers were not going to be allowed their march in Washington, the leadership, headed by a man called Herbert Benjamin (whom I subsequently met some years later, more than ten years later, I guess, and was then no longer politically active)--but, led by him, the marchers assembled and said that they were going to have their march on the viaduct. As I recall, there was much on this in the previous twenty-four hours in the newspaper about what the police would do if they attempted to break through the police lines. And long before the hour at which this was to take place (it was in the daytime), the lines of the police were heavily

reinforced. So that when the march started, the police were there with rifles to their shoulders, and shotguns, and I don't recall whether or not they had machine guns as well. The marchers, moving from about 400 yards or so, as I best recall, away from the police lines, moved steadily toward them, I suppose singing a song like "Solidarity Forever" (whether or not they had any musical instruments, I don't recall). And yard by yard, as they approached the police lines and as the safety catches were pushed off on the weapons, the situation became more and more tense. But then about perhaps ten yards from the police lines, the leading line swung around and moved back, and the whole line of marchers turned. It was not, I think, an empty gesture; on the contrary, for these men and women who had been locked up and kept in miserable circumstances for a number of days and nights (I don't remember how long), it was a gesture of their defiance and their determination that they would continue to struggle for what they wanted.

I think it was that night that Michael Blankfort, who had been the producer of Merry Go Round and was with us, did something which required a lot of nerve and a lot of feeling. The chief of police came to the viaduct to look over the situation. I believe that there had been some agreement (I'm not sure of this) beforehand that women could be taken out and put into homes that the Unemployed

Council in Washington had secured for them. Blankfort just said that he was a member of the Civil Liberties Union, and I remember the chief of police immediately cautioning several of his underlings that the Civil Liberties Union was a different kind of an outfit from the Red organizations. And from then on he consulted with Blankfort about what to do, and I know that through Blankfort's intercession in this nervy role things were speeded up. I believe more people got out than would have because I think it was a question not just of women but of those men who were ill. I recall at the time that a black church was put at the disposal of the Unemployed Councils where the people could lie on the floor or be on chairs or benches, and where there was some warmth . . . and toilets. At the same time, this being the sort of interplay that occurs in such situations, about every third or fourth taxi going out past the police lines had its tires pierced by ice picks, so that they came to a halt within a few yards and had to change a tire.

I do remember another little footnote: that was the first time I ever saw Michael Gold. He was there with a rather large group that had come down from New York, and I saw him taking voluminous notes during the days that the people were bottled up there. And if ever someone looked like a "proletarian" writer, it was Michael Gold--very handsome in a craggy way. And I would have said, surely

out of this will come some wonderful book, since by that time I had read his fine book Jews Without Money and thought that he had a big talent. Jews Without Money was really an autobiographical book rather than a novel. And Gold did have talent, but, as I discovered later, he completely lacked what the greatest majority of writers must have, and that's the dedication to his work--a dedication to his work sufficient to command him to write and rewrite until what he was after was good. I later came to know a woman who had lived with him for a number of years and she explained how he would write. He would write a short story and give it to her to read, and she would say, "I like it, Mike, but I think it would be improved if you would do such and such and such and such." And he would say, "Yes, you are right." And then some weeks later, she might say, "What happened to that story? Did you rewrite it?" And he'd say, "No, I decided not to rewrite it. I just sent it out to a magazine. If they want to print it, let them; if not, to hell with it." He just didn't have within him the ability to sit and work at a piece of material. As a result, his life consisted mainly just of journalism in which he did some fine things and some things that were not fine. But it's a very interesting sidelight on one of the aspects of writing since there was no question of his basic talent.

This is all that I want to say about that particular

incident of the Unemployed Councils. But like the bonus march, it was such a cruel example of naked repression that it continued for me the radicalizing process. Because there was no reason whatsoever why 1,000 to 2,000 people could not have marched in Washington. They were not dangerous. They had no weapons. Even if every one of them had had a machine gun, they were still helpless before the might of the U.S. Army and the police force and the FBI and whatever else. It was just ridiculous to treat them that way, and it seemed as though everything that one might read in the Daily Worker or the New Masses about the cruelty of capitalism was being played out before one's eyes.

During this year and beginning in the previous year, I believe, and to continue on for some years after, there was the terrible case of the nine Scottsboro boys, ranging in age I think from fourteen to about eighteen, who had all been accused of raping two white girls on a railroad train moving through Alabama. The youngsters had denied the rape, and it was quite conclusively proved later that they were innocent of it, but they were held guilty and. . . . Were they all sentenced to death? All of them except perhaps the youngest. There is much source material on this, so I don't have to bother to verify it. But it was a terrible case, and the case took a sharp turn in the year '32, or '33 I think, when one of the two girls, Ruby Bates, repudiated her

testimony after seeing the Protestant clergyman, Fosdick, in New York City, and said that it had not been true. I subsequently met her and spoke on a platform with her, and I'll deal with that when the time comes. But inasmuch as the horror and disgrace and undemocratic nature of racial discrimination was one of the earliest aspects of my social awareness, I was especially sensitive to this issue of the Scottsboro boys. I know I gave money to their legal defense. I'm sure I signed petitions for them. I seem to remember that I did some public speaking for them, but I'm not absolutely sure of it. You want to. . . ? [tape recorder turned off]

At this point, in order to present what my own psychology was, I'd like to mention some facts about the world in which I was living. And I would say--emphasize--I was living day to day; by that I mean that each day's newspapers brought with them new horrors. Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. He became chancellor not because he had the majority of votes of the people--he didn't. Because in the last election, before he became chancellor, his total vote had fallen, I believe, from 38 percent to 32 percent. His was the largest party of all the parties, but it was not a majority party. However, he was offered the chancellorship by President Hindenburg and he accepted.

I want to refer now to a book on the history of that

period, before and later, called The Cold War and Its Origins by D.F. Fleming. This is a very long, two-volume work which begins in the year 1917 and goes to 1960. Professor Fleming is a professor emeritus at the moment of Vanderbilt University. And I think that this is the most objective and perhaps most extraordinary work of political history that I've ever read. The man's knowledge and sources are enormous, his presentation extraordinarily clear, his ability to sum up a year on a page is unusual, and it is, I think, an indispensable reference work for the years that he covered. He says about this period before Hitler took power the following: "With equal blindness the Kremlin continued to support the German Communists in their fratricidal war with the German Socialists, until Hitler mastered both of them." I want to stop and comment on that because I have a strong belief about it that I haven't particularly seen expressed elsewhere. (For all I know, it has been expressed many times, and I merely have not read it elsewhere.)

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 26, 1976

GARDNER: You were about to. . . .

MALTZ: What Fleming was referring to is the policy that the German Communists pursued from the 1920s right through to Hitler's accession to power--a policy called "social fascism." Now, the origin of this policy came about in 1918 or '19 when there was an unsuccessful revolt in Germany led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. This was in the period after the disastrous German defeat in World War I, and I believe it was called the Spartacus rebellion [Spartacist revolt--January 1919] (I can't be sure of that without looking up the data). In any instance, it was decidedly a Communist-led revolt, which was put down in very bloody fashion by the government (which was then, as I recall, in the hands of the Social Democratic party).

As a result of this action, the Communist International, which was an association of all Communist parties led by the Communist party in the Soviet Union, and therefore by Stalin himself, adopted a political line which declared that the Socialist leadership was not Socialist but was social fascist. Under this political line, Communists should always try to have association and political unity with rank-and-file Socialists, but never with the Socialist leadership.

The result of this, of course, was to maintain and deepen the hostility between the Socialist and Communist leaderships. In addition, the Socialists had been, before the war--and continued to be after the war--the leaders of the German trade unions. I think I might add something. There was a great betrayal of the working class, the organized working class of Europe in World War I, and this is how it occurred.

Shortly before World War I, the First International of working-class parties, led by the Socialists, met and declared that in the event of war the Socialists and Socialist-led workers would not support their own governments: that they wanted peace, and they didn't want to participate in the slaughter of workers from other countries. But, in fact, when World War I broke out, all of the Socialist parties of Europe without exception supported their own governments. And throughout the four years of World War I, there was the spectacle of Socialists from Germany shooting at Socialists from France, and workers of France killing workers of Germany, and so on. And this, too, lay behind the doctrine adopted by the Communist International of social fascism.

As a result of this doctrine, the German Communists established German-led trade unions, and those Socialist workers who followed the Communist party broke away from the Socialist unions and joined the Communist unions; and

others who were not Communist party members joined the Communist unions. But the Socialists still continued to lead by far the strongest unions as a whole. This action and this doctrine on the part of the Communist International and the German Communist party, however much it may have been justified in their minds when it originated, had clearly become out of date when the rise of the Hitler movement and its growing strength quite obviously threatened but the Socialist and the Communist parties, and the intellectuals and others in Germany. Two neighbors may have been deeply hostile for a long time, but if a fire comes into their area that threatens to burn both their houses down, it is certainly the part of stupidity if they don't join hands to try and put the fire out.

The Communists did not join hands with the Socialists, not with their leadership. As a matter of fact, very late in the game, on some tricky issue or another, the Communists voted side by side with the Nazis in the Reichstag. Now, the failure to perceive that the situation had changed enormously and that a peace had to be made with the Socialist leadership against a greater common enemy was directly the result of Comintern policy, or the Communist International policy. (For the moment I forget: there's a differentiation between Comintern and Communist International, and I forget it. Maybe Comintern was later than the Communist

International.) But the Communist International policy, in turn, had been formulated by Stalin and could be changed only by Stalin, because such was Stalin's grasp on the entire international Communist movement.

Now, I don't know the history of Germany intimately enough, but I would say just offhand that I wouldn't absolve the Socialist leadership of certain failures it must have probably committed in that period. But it does seem to me, as I look back upon it, that the prime reason for the continued disunity of Socialists and Communists in the face of the rise of Hitler was the policy enunciated, the policy formulated by Stalin and kept in command for far too long.

In March 23, 1933--that is just about three months after he became chancellor--Hitler was given dictatorial powers.

GARDNER: How aware were you of not simply Hitler's succession--which was of course in the papers and so on--but of the interplay of the Communists, Nazis, and so forth at the time? And how much of this was sort of review?

MALTZ: At that time I was certainly not aware of what I have just been talking about. As a matter of fact, I would say that I had not formulated the culpability of Stalin in all of this until, oh, three, four years ago. I hadn't dwelt on it, or I hadn't formulated it. I think perhaps it was the reading of the Fleming book about three years ago that brought about this realization. And I haven't tested

what I have just put down here, what I've just spoken, with some friends who would have some knowledge of the period and ideas of their own. I expect to do so with someone in the course of the next week or so, and I will be interested to see whether I change my mind at all. But for the moment it's in order and I want to put it down.

Hitler received dictatorial powers after the carefully staged burning of the German parliament, the Reichstag, by the Nazis (who blamed it upon the Communists), and after the forcible dissolution of all other parties, except the National Socialist party, and of the trade unions, and of the immediate outbreak of violence that began with the official and unofficial arrest of Communist and Socialist trade union leaders and various left-wing intellectuals, the beatings and torture that began in Nazi headquarters, and the open violence against Jews. I am not going here to go into that because anyone reading this oral history who wants more information will have more than enough sources to which to go. But I merely want to register these things as horrors on an enormous scale that affected my consciousness and passions and that of, I think, many millions of others. On May 10 the same year, 1933, there was another terrible, terribly shocking event: the burning of books that the Nazis staged opposite the University of Berlin. You want to shut off for a moment, I want to get. . . . [tape recorder turned off]

Many of the books tossed into the flames in Berlin that night by the joyous students [Nazi students, of course] under the approving eye of Dr. Goebbels, had been written by authors of world reputation.

(I'm quoting now from William Shirer, page 241, in The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.)

They included, among German writers, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Jakob Wassermann, Arnold and Stefan Zweig, Erich Maria Remarque, Walther Rathenau, Albert Einstein, Alfred Kerr, and Hugo Preuss, the last named being the scholar who had drafted the Weimar Constitution. But not only the works of dozens of German writers were burned. A good many foreign authors were also included: Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Helen Keller, Margaret Sanger, H.G. Wells, Havelock Ellis, Arthur Schnitzler, Freud, Gide, Zola, Proust. In the words of a student proclamation, any book was condemned to the flames which acts subversively on our future or strikes at the root of German thought, the German home and the driving forces of our people.

I just want to pause and say that, while not at all subscribing to the belief (that not a few people have) that the Communist dictatorship in Russia, or let's say the Stalinist dictatorship and the Nazi dictatorship are the same (because I don't believe this at all), nevertheless, in the insistence on books that serve the state, there is an identity here of policy. Now, it is true that you will find a Jack London and Upton Sinclair and H.G. Wells and Zola and Proust in the Lenin Library in Moscow. But I think it is also true that you would not

find Freud: he would probably be restricted to maybe a psychological library, and you'd have to get permission to read him. Nor would you find Havelock Ellis on the general lists there. However, the important thing is the shock that my friends and I felt at this burning of books and burning of authors we cherished, and what it meant about the Nazi system. I remember that I attended a meeting of the John Reed Club at which protests were voted and sent to the German government about this book burning and about the arrest of certain figures we had heard about. (The John Reed Club, incidentally, was a literary cultural organization with branches in various cities in the United States, organized by the Communist party. I forget just when it was organized. It was around when I came down to live in New York after Yale, and I went to some of its meetings, and I know I was present at this one.)

Later that year, both Japan and Germany resigned from the League of Nations. And while the League of Nations had not proved to be the international organization that President Wilson had hoped it would be, nevertheless its seat in Geneva was a place where nations could meet and talk and debate, and there was something clearly ominous about the decision of Japan and Germany to resign. Can we just turn it off for a moment? [tape recorder turned off]

In the United States, during this period of the coming to power of fascism in Germany, there was quite an opposite phenomenon--the assumption of office by Franklin Roosevelt and the beginnings of the New Deal. [It is] perhaps illustrative of the differences between the two countries that some of the instructors I had known at college, like Rexford Guy Tugwell, who had taught a couple of classes that I had, and Raymond Moley, went to Washington as important advisers to Roosevelt. And various students who had become attorneys, whose decency and humanity I knew, went down to Washington to work in the agriculture department and in other phases of government. And certainly, contrary to the burning of books, you had a significant cultural advancement under Roosevelt when the government sponsored the WPA theater and dance and art projects in an effort to give artists a minimum amount of support in those very difficult economic times. What resulted from this action under Roosevelt was quite a burgeoning of artistic activity. I still have on my shelves the magnificent WPA set of guidebooks about all of the different states in the United States which were written by writers under the project and which researched all aspects of every state in the union. And it was under WPA that the United States made one of its two rather unique contributions to dramaturgy that I know about, and that was the living newspaper, which was a very

exciting form of journalistic drama, which we could use in the theater today, but it perhaps would be too expensive for commercial production. The only other American contribution that I know of which was, let's say, decidedly American was the development of the musical comedy in the form that we know it here.

At the same time, during these early years of the Roosevelt New Deal and stretching right up throughout the thirties, reaching a peak in '37 and '38, there were labor struggles for elementary rights, the right to form a union, an independent union, being the most fundamental one. Because in that period in American life many of the industrial companies formed their own unions; this was their way of trying to assure their workers that they were indeed a member of the union. In fact, these unions were responsive not to the needs of the workers but to the needs of the company. And so they were called company unions. Side by side with that, there was a tremendous use, by large companies especially, of detective agencies and hired thugs to see to it that no independent unions were formed. To be a union member at that time, let's say in the year 1934, in auto, or in steel, or in electrical manufacturing plants, or among seamen, to be a member, that is to say, of an independent union was first of all to be a secret member. If you did not keep your membership secret, you were liable

from anything to being fired from your job and being black-listed throughout the given industry in which you worked to a beating, to death. And all of these occurred to individuals whose membership in unions was discovered. And since my sympathies lay with all of those men and women who worked on jobs where their wages might be thirty cents an hour; where the conditions of their work were such that often they were not given permission even to go to the toilet; where there was a great lack of safety devices of all sorts so that the accident rate, from lost fingers to corroded lungs to death, was enormously higher than it need have been. . . . At this point I find I don't remember how I began my sentence, but I'll let you do some editing to fix it up. Unless we want to reverse and let me hear. . . . But I'm painting a picture, in brief, as I wanted to be, of industrial conditions where my sympathy lay with the working people, who were being frightfully exploited and abused.

Throughout this entire year, the Scottsboro case continued, and it was in March of this year that Ruby Bates reversed her testimony and said she had not been raped by the Scottsboro boys. And I believe that it was in the year 1933 that another case came up and got national attention--and that was the Angelo Herndon case.

Angelo Herndon was a young black man (it so happens an

exceedingly handsome man) who was framed on some charge or other (I don't remember what anymore, and I haven't paused for research), but he was finally freed, as the Scottsboro boys were saved from death, by the intercession of the International Labor Defense. Now, I mention this because once again we find an organization with Communists in leadership and control. It took principle and it took courage for attorneys of the ILD to go into the Deep South, in the face of what the Deep South was in the year 1932 and '33, where lynching could be the price they paid, and there to fight in court against a frame-up of black men. And I was aware of the nature of the ILD and what it was accomplishing.

Nineteen thirty-three was also a year of considerable, very profound, personal importance to me. My father became fatally ill in January. It was the recurrence of a cancer which had been dealt with surgically in the summer before, and he died early in February. And in October my mother, who had fallen ill some months later, also died. Very strangely, she died on my twenty-fifth birthday, and it was on my thirty-ninth birthday that I testified in Washington before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (a double coincidence which I just happened to recognize when I was writing these notes).

In that year, when personal affairs permitted, George Sklar and I continued our work on the play Peace on Earth,

and in the spring of that year, 1933, it was accepted by the Executive Board of the Theatre Union for production as its first play. We had revisions to do, which we promptly began to work on and which we worked on through the summer. In the spring, and at various times during the summer and in the early fall, one of the things that I did was to read the play to groups of individuals, who would be gathered in a home, in order that we might raise money. We'd say, "Here's the play we want to do, and what money can you give us?" And in September we began casting the play. And now I want to go into the whole story of the Theatre Union, which played an important part in my life in those years. [tape recorder turned off]

I was a member of the Theatre Union Executive Board from the time that serious planning first began on the part of the Executive Board in the fall of 1932 until the time that we dissolved the theater, through our inability to handle its mounting debt, in the summer of 1937--almost five years of very intensive work, and a period important in my life, and so I want to give relevant information as briefly as I can. The leading spirit in the organization of the theater was Charles Rumford Walker, who was a man in his early forties when the theater began. And although others who joined the theater board were of great importance in its functioning, I don't think the theater would have come into

existence without Walker because he was the man who raised most of the money for our first several productions, particularly the first. He was able to do this because he was a Yale graduate and numbered some wealthy men among his friends. George Sklar was also a Yale graduate but had not had friends on the same economic level as Charles Walker. The group that came together was an interesting one because, unlike those who made up the directorship of the Group Theatre or the Theatre Guild, all of whom were theater people, only a portion of the Executive Board of the Theatre Union was made up of people whose prime interest and training had been in the theater: these were George Sklar, Paul Peters, Michael Blankfort, and myself, and within another year, Victor Wolfson. But important in the Executive Board were Mary Fox, who was a leading member of the Socialist party and a director of an organization called the League for Industrial Democracy, and Samuel Friedman, another member of the Socialist party who was, I believe, one of the editors of the New Leader. [Then there was] Liston Oak, who was a Communist party member and who worked in different mass organizations in one leadership capacity or another, minor leadership, and Manuel and Sylvia Gomez. Sylvia Gomez was an actress without much of a career behind her, but that was her orientation. Manuel Gomez had been a Communist party member until about five years before and had been one of

the leaders of some anti-imperialist organization during the twenties when the United States sent troops into Nicaragua and other Latin American countries. He was now, under another name, a columnist in the Wall Street Journal, of all places. And finally, there was a former newspaperwoman and trade union publicist, Margaret Larkin.

Now, I go into these different names because, although they are mentioned in at least one of the books that I am going to mention myself here, they aren't mentioned with the real meaning of these names made clear. This was a unique coming together of people who had training as organizational leaders, but not specifically in the theater, although they were interested in the theater, and of those who had training in the theater but no organizational experience. And the day after our first production opened, this peculiar meld began to take on an unusual dynamic--something I think that had probably never been seen before in the American professional theater. There's perhaps another reason for my going into this in the way I'm going to: the records of the Theatre Union, for the most part, were given to the New York Public Library when the organization ceased to exist, and then by the New York library to the library of Lincoln Center. And a scholar whom I know in New York had occasion to look at these records about five or six years ago. He told me that they were in an absolutely deplorable state: that they

are so faded and they've been so badly kept that they're likely pretty soon just to fall to pieces. And so I want to use this opportunity to give my point of view of what I remember about this organization.

Now, I do want to mention that there are a number of books that I'm aware of (and perhaps some that I'm not aware of) that deal with the Theatre Union as part of a study of the theater in the United States in the 1930s. The two best of these books that I know are The Political Stage, by Malcolm Goldstein (published by Oxford University Press), and Stage Left, by Jay Williams (published by Scribner's). Absolutely the worst is a book called Drama Was a Weapon, by Morgan Himelstein (published by Rutgers University Press). [Another] one, of which I haven't read much, but the little I've read dismays me, although it may be that the author had certain things of value in it, [is] called People's Theatre in Amerika. America is spelled A-M-E-R-I-K-A, and anything spelled that way impresses me badly. This is, I suppose, an author of the New Left in the sixties and, as I understand it, the spelling of America in that way is supposed to indicate that America is a fascist country. And the author of this nonsensical title is Karen Malpede Taylor. I'll have more to say about the Himelstein book as I go on.

It's very interesting to see the list of people who were willing to have their names used as part of the advisory

board of the Theatre Union. Now, in fact, I doubt whether very much advice came from these individuals. Advisory board [is] another name, really, for sponsors, or "Go ahead, fellas, we hope you do well." But among the advisers, among the advisory board, were Sherwood Anderson, Paul Muni the actor (very celebrated then), John Dos Passos, Elmer Rice, Edmund Wilson, Morrie Ryskind (who later became a very bitter, savage, anti-Communist columnist), Roger Baldwin (one of the heads of the American Civil Liberties Union), and Stephen Vincent Benét. And this is a comment on the temper of the times. It has for me the same meaning as the list of names, the partial list of names I read earlier, of those who supported William Z. Foster and James Ford for the presidency in the fall of 1932.

There had been for some years in the United States a number of left-wing theaters, which called themselves by different names and were all amateur theaters. And for the most part, they talked rather than did: they discussed theory; they tried to train themselves in acting; they tried to write. And where they produced material it tended to be what was called agitprop theater. Agitprop comes from the larger words agitational propaganda, and it was a form of theater that frequently could be very effective and very interesting and was modeled after left-wing educational theater, really, that had been produced in Germany by workers' groups before Hitler's coming to power.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 26, 1976

MALTZ: The word propaganda has a different meaning in Europe than it has in the United States. Here we tend to regard propaganda as something that is self-serving to the organization or person who puts it out, and likely not to be true. But in Europe it has more the sense of educational. If, for instance, one were to take a lyric by Bertolt Brecht, with music by Hanns Eisler or Kurt Weill, and sing that from the back of a truck in a street meeting, that would be called an agitprop presentation. But in fact it was, let's say, just an attempt to educate on a social or political theme, and these amateur groups sometimes did some interesting work in that way.

But the Theatre Union board was composed of individuals who had a different goal, and that was to create a professional theater that would aspire to the theatrical excellence of the Group Theatre, because we were admirers of the Group Theatre's high standards of acting, directing, and general presentation; but we wanted to be more consistent in dealing with plays of social importance. When I refer to plays of social importance, the words should not be construed narrowly. We were living at a time when the failures of society, not only in the United States but in all the countries

of the world, which were also suffering from a depression, impinged with terrible force daily on the lives of millions upon millions of human beings. Social problems were everywhere about us, were in every newspaper we opened every morning, and we felt that there should be theater that dealt with these problems. It was not, let's say, that if I went to Broadway myself and saw a delicious farce comedy like Three Men on a Horse that I wouldn't laugh and wouldn't say, "Well, of course there is a place in the theater for such plays." But rather we felt that there was a lack in the theater of plays that also dealt with the lives of working people who made up the largest percentage of the American population; and yet their lives, their conflicts, problems, hopes, ambitions, failures were scarcely ever mirrored in the American theater. And just as a novelist like Zola can be considered a social novelist, so, let's say for myself, I hoped to be a social playwright at that time, and we on the Executive Board hoped to make the Theatre Union a theater of social importance. I might say just in passing that there was really a long history to such theater: not a few of the plays of Ibsen have dealt with social problems--a play like An Enemy of the People, a play like A Doll's House; not a few of Galsworthy's plays--Justice, The Silver Box, The Skin Game, Foundations--dealt with social problems, and I could go on and on in

mentioning this. Nevertheless, for this time in American theater, the program, or the goal of the Theatre Union, was something fresh and of course came out of the convulsive events of the Depression.

We published a statement--or probably more than one statement, but the only one I have on hand--expressing our point of view is the following: "We produce plays that deal boldly with the deep-growing social conflicts, the economic, emotional, and cultural problems that confront the majority of the people. Our plays speak directly to this majority whose lives usually are caricatured or ignored on stage. We do not expect that these plays will fall into accepted social patterns. This is a new kind of professional theater based on the interests and hopes of the great mass of working people." As I go through my discussion of the Theatre Union plays, I will comment on the extent to which I think we realized this objective and the extent to which we didn't.

There were several specific practical policies that the Theatre Union developed that need to be mentioned. First of all, and something that we who were members of it can remain proud of, we ended all seating discrimination in the American theater. Until the first Theatre Union play came on, even in New York City all black people who wanted to go to a play had to sit in the balcony; they were not permitted in the orchestras of any theater in New York City.

We ended that with our first play, and although it was not immediately copied by the other theaters, I believe it may have been copied fairly soon by the Group Theatre. And during World War II, it was copied by the other theaters because it was part of the national push against fascism, and the stress on American democracy to do so. But this is something that we started.

Secondly, the members of the Executive Board worked without any remuneration whatsoever. And the actors, the director of a given play, and the staff whom we needed to run the organization day by day (a small staff but it was a staff) worked for forty dollars a week. The forty dollar figure was chosen because that was the minimum that the actors' union, [Actors] Equity, would permit professional actors to work for. And so, taking the forty dollar minimum, which was all we could afford for our actors, we gave the same salary to our executive director and to the publicity person and so on. (And, I might say, to the janitor, the one who cleaned out the Theatre Union and who was kind of a watchman--he received the same salary.) When we had some stars, as we did for certain plays--for instance, in our first play a very well-known actor, Robert Keith; in our second play, Tom Powers, who was associated with the Theatre Guild and many of its important productions--[they] received the same salary, forty dollars.

We established a ticket price of a maximum of \$1.50 in the first half of the orchestra at a time when in Broadway the equivalent seats were \$3.30; the balance of the orchestra was \$1.00. The first balcony was seventy-five cents and fifty cents, and the second balcony, because it was a very large theater seating 1,100 or 1,200 people, was thirty-five cents. And we also had a policy, once we began to perform, of appealing to the audience between acts for any contributions they wanted to give on their way out so that free tickets could be given to members of unemployed organizations. And whether or not we got the contributions, whenever there was room in our house we always distributed free tickets to members of Unemployed Councils--or unemployed organizations, because we didn't select the Communist-led as against the Socialists; we gave equally.

We also developed something very interesting. There had been in the New York theater before (and I don't know how many years before) the practice of selling benefits from time to time to different organizations that might want to take over a house or a portion of a house. But we developed this into a very fine art. Because there were in the whole perspective of the Left, and this includes all stripes of people, many organizations--sometimes rather small ones, sometimes large, and constantly proliferating in that period in the thirties--organizations that needed

money. Consequently, if we had a given chapter of the Socialist LID or of a Communist group or of a civil liberties group that wanted to take anywhere from 50 to 100 to 500 tickets to 800 tickets, we would give them those tickets at half-price. Selling at half-price, we were able to keep going. But they could then sell their tickets at the regular rate to their members; they would make the difference of the half-price as profit for their little organization or their large organization. We sold them to trade union groups trying to raise money. And in this way, by the time we had finished the first two plays we had about ten weeks of benefits sold in advance of the raising of a curtain. Now, that does not mean that we had every seat for the ten weeks sold out (for the performances of ten weeks), but what we did have was a sufficient number of benefits sold that we could sell them up through a ten-week period and know that we would get enough individual tickets sold to fill the house sufficiently to keep our play going. Now, when we did that we were also able, by the time of the third play and even before, by the second, to start to use that advance benefit money to raise the curtain on our plays. Because raising money to start each new play was a big job in itself. Charles Walker did that primarily for the first play, and I think it cost us on the average about \$7,000 at that time to raise the curtain on a play. Probably on Broadway it

cost \$20,000, \$25,000, \$30,000. And in this manner we were able to survive.

Now, we also had to get a theater, and we found out in exploring Broadway theaters that they were too costly for us; we would not have been able to function in them. But a theater opened up that was very desirable, and that was the well-known Civic Repertory Theatre on Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue in New York, lower Manhattan.

This had been, for a good number of years, certainly at least from about 1929 or earlier (I began to attend it, I guess, starting in '29)--it had been the theater run by Eva Le Galliene, who was an excellent actress, a fine director, a woman of great love of theater and taste in theater, and who had a repertory theater that did important plays . . . [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] . . . from the literature of all countries. She had been unable to continue her theater for financial reasons, and we found that the rental of the house was possible for us to manage. The fact that we moved into the Civic Repertory after she had been there gave us the advantage of being able to invite critics to it, and they came from all the newspapers for our first production. It was also a house to which people with a love of theater had been accustomed to go, even though at that time there was no off-Broadway theater in the way that has developed in recent years.

Peace on Earth, our first play, required a very large cast. We reduced the number of actors we had to hire by having some of the actors play two and three roles, and this could be done because some of them were brief speaking parts that didn't occur again. And it was a play with not a few sets. We had as director a man who had been, I think, an assistant to George Kaufman--Robert Sinclair--who had not directed a play as such before, who proved to be a good director and went on from Peace on Earth to direct a whole series of important plays in the theater. We had some splendid actors, among them Robert Keith, whom I have mentioned, who had a leading role in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes; Howard Da Silva, who is still acting today; Martin Wolfson, who was to remain a prominent character actor for the years ahead; Millicent Green, who had had the lead in Elmer Rice's Street Scene a few years before; George Tobias, and others. So that even though we were not opening with much money, and even though we were not paying more than the Equity minimum, we had quite an excellent cast. We couldn't afford to go out of town the way most producers tried to handle their plays at that time--going out before audiences in New Haven and Philadelphia and Baltimore and so on. So what we did was to inaugurate what became a practice for us: preliminary previews at which certain people were invited, and most were asked to pay but

got still cheaper seats. And so we got audience reaction and sometimes did some rewriting, changing, and so on.

We opened Peace on Earth on Thanksgiving eve, 1933, and the reviews for the most part were disastrous. I'll now read a few of them. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times said: "As propaganda against war, Peace on Earth is pathetically inadequate. Being conceived in a mood of adolescent hysteria, it is as maudlin as the mob it denounces." At the end he said: "And this column must conclude by simply confessing that, although it holds no brief for the ideas or the workmanship of Peace on Earth, it was made furiously to think. Perhaps that is all the authors intended." I know that at that time--and still today, I would say--that a play that made Brooks Atkinson "furiously to think" was not quite as adolescent and pathetically inadequate as he asserted it was. On the other hand, I do not have the impression that it was a very good play. I think it was strident. I think it was overwrought. And I think there is a good reason why it has not entered into the repertoire of theater since. Percy Hammond of the Herald-Tribune said: "The drama was a militant thing of thirty scenes or more, frothing at the mouth in anger with the profiteering warlords and contempt for their supine subjects. It was often theatrically effective also in a front-page way since it contained murders, riots, strikes,

parades, hot oratory, and battle cries. Presented so swiftly that it sometimes lost its breath, it moved along at a jazz tempo to which scores of excellent cooperative actors kept step." On the other hand, Joseph Freeman, writing in the Daily Worker, said: "The Theatre Union's production opened Wednesday night before a mixed audience of evening clothes and flannel shirts, who were swept by the play's power into prolonged applause. The house was filled not merely with the intellectual response evoked by good propaganda, but with the emotional tension aroused by good art." Well, he was reflecting the much warmer response of those who welcomed the politics of the play, really, and who therefore were less inclined to be critical of other aspects--although he was critical of certain aspects of it.

The next morning after the opening, the Executive Board of the Theatre Union met. Personally, I can't remember a Thanksgiving morning in which I felt more blue. Since George Sklar and I only knew the experience of the professional theater, we would have expected that the play would have closed after a few more nights. But then we found a quite different attitude on the part of the members of the Executive Board, whose personal experience was an organizational one and who had worked, or were working, in mass organizations. They said, "Oh no, we're not going to close this play, we're going to fight for it." And they

proceeded to suggest all of those measures which they had used, let's say, in situations when they were fighting to support strikers, or to advance a civil liberties cause, or to arouse people against American intervention in Nicaragua. As a result, plans were immediately drawn up, of which I can remember some.

One was to raise emergency money to keep the play going long enough so that word of mouth about it could spread. Now, how was word of mouth to spread since the reviews were so bad? Well, first of all, we would invite to the theater, free of charge, the heads of as many trade unions and mass organizations as were willing to come. We would call them and get right after them, and lists were drawn up of those contacts that different members had. If they liked the play, we would then urge them to urge their constituencies to come. And we would also ask for the right to have members of the Theatre Union board address their executive board meetings or their union meetings or organizational meetings. A leaflet was composed that in effect said: this is a play that you will like; the prices are only such and such. And plans were laid to immediately get ahold of unemployed workers who, for a small fee or for support of the Theatre Union (I don't remember what), would stuff these leaflets into mailboxes in the whole area around our theater--just put them there as flyers. And I imagine

that the benefit system probably began a great push at that moment to get benefits.

What happened on the play as a result of this and other such moves--and it resulted, by the way, that for the first time of our lives George Sklar and I, and others like us in the theater, began to make public speeches. I can remember with what trepidation and with what headaches I faced my first public speeches. It might have been before audiences of maybe only 50 or 100 or 200 people, but it was not easy going to do that; and yet we went and did it in order to fight for our play and for our theater.

And a fascinating thing happened. The play did not break even in its running. I think it cost probably about \$3,000 a week or \$2,500 a week of intake to pay the salaries of the actors and our small staff. We, the authors, didn't take royalties. And for the first weeks it lost money. In order to pay the salaries and to pay the rent and the electric light bill and the phone bill, money had to be raised to keep the theater going. And it was also quite cold in the succeeding months, which would keep people away from the theater. But nevertheless, as the weeks went on the size of the audiences began to grow, and it became apparent that here was a play that had a good word of mouth when certain people came to it. And sometimes these people, as we discovered, had never seen a play before. They came out and said, "That was

a great picture show I saw." (I overheard someone saying that.) And the naiveté of some of them was such that once we found in an alley outside of the stage-door entrance a group of men, of seamen I think, who were waiting for one of the villains to come out, and they wanted to beat him up. What we called the carriage trade--that is to say, people who came in taxis or in limousines such as you see in the Broadway theater--did not appear until the play had been running for about ten weeks; but then the carriage trade began to appear. And this play had a twenty-six-week run, which is half a year's run, and then was taken over by some outfit, a commercial outfit, and ran four or six weeks more on Broadway. Now, that's a hit run for a play--or it was at that time. And it never would have occurred without this group of people on the Executive Board whom I have described. And interestingly enough, some of the reviewers came down to take another look at it and wrote some more favorable pieces about it. In some of the papers where they had derided it as hysterical, they now described it as "excitingly militant." So it was certainly not the best play in the world, but it was not without its merit, and it did have a theatrical appeal for people.

During the period of its run and subsequently, I and others had constant work to do for the Theatre Union. It was very time-consuming but very exciting for us. There

were the weekly board meetings, and sometimes there had to be two and three a week if there was a crisis of some sort. These [were] always in the evening or on a weekend since various of our members had jobs. There were the making of speeches, which I mentioned, but there was constant reading of new plays because we were seeking new material. And as the occasion would warrant, one or another of us, or several of us at once, would be working with different playwrights and trying to have a play that had partial quality, but was not right, rewritten--and we would do that. And then myself, I was going on to try and write another play and so also were the others.

During the run of the play Peace on Earth, George Sklar got together with Paul Peters to write a play called Stevedore. This had been based upon an earlier play by Peters [Wharf Nigger] which was more limited than the one that they finally put out together. Theirs was a very successful collaboration, and their play proved to be the most successful, both aesthetically and in terms of audience, and financially, of any that we were to put on in the next period. [tape recorder turned off] The Theatre Union board decided that Stevedore would be its next production and that it would be in the fall of 1934, since Peace on Earth continued up through to the summer of 1934, as I recall.

GARDNER: Were you working on other projects at this time?

MALTZ: I had started work on another play, yes. By myself.

GARDNER: Which was. . . ?

MALTZ: A play that--I don't remember its title; it never matured and never came to anything. I don't think I began it until well into the spring because of all the other involvements. However, I would like to pause at this moment to discuss one of the books I mentioned before, Drama Was a Weapon, by Himelstein, because it explains in part why I am anxious to do this oral history. Himelstein, at least when the book was published, was teaching at Rutgers University; the book was published by the Rutgers University Press. It's undoubtedly in all libraries around the United States, and anybody who reads it will get an absolutely wrong thesis about the Theatre Union and the Left theater, and indeed, the theater in general in the thirties.

In effect, Himelstein's thesis is that in the thirties there was a decision on the part of the Communist party to take over the theater for its purposes. That is to say, some Communist leaders sitting together at a table said in effect, "Let's take over the American theater." Hence they established the Theatre Union and the Group Theatre and the Theatre of Action and other of the Left theaters, and they wormed their way into the Theatre Guild. And although they didn't succeed in taking over the Theatre Guild, they did succeed in getting it to produce John Wexley's

They Shall Not Die about the Scottsboro boys, and Parade by George Sklar and Paul Peters. Now, this absolutely vulgar and stupid thesis is the kind of thing that I want to correct insofar as my experience permits me to do so in this oral history.

It never occurred to Himelstein that since the United States and the world were convulsed by events like the Depression and the coming of fascism to Germany, that this would be reflected in what people in all forms of art did. People react to events like this, therefore it was very natural that certain painters would paint certain things that reflected the world that was around them. And you began to get in painting and photography portraits of unemployed people; it was a natural piece of subject material. You began to see it reflected in short stories, in magazine articles, and in novels. And it wasn't that the Communist leadership sat down and said, "Aha! We will take over the American novel! We will take over the American magazine!" They could have said that until they were blue in the face, and it would not have made any difference unless writers themselves had reacted with their hearts and their guts to what they were seeing.

So in the course of events, the people who ran the Theatre Guild decided that they would do something like the Wexley play because they found it stirring and meaningful.

And after they had produced Parade--which was not too successful itself, and which cost them, as I just read, \$100,000 and was a failure with their audiences--they didn't do any more of that kind of thing. But it was they, nevertheless, who sponsored a new theater called the Group Theatre and helped it with money at first. And the Group Theatre was the response of a certain number of people who had ideas about society; they weren't in general as Left as the people in the Theatre Union but they were reacting. And it is, to me, so unfortunate and so outrageous that a man like Himmelstein would have his book on library shelves, and people will read it and say, "Aha! This is what happened in the thirties!" But my outrage doesn't last long, because one has to be philosophic about it. This is the way all history has probably been written and rewritten, and there is no way to prevent that. The only thing that one can do, if one has participated in certain events, and if one has the opportunity as I have now, is to try and set whatever record you do know straight. And that's where we are. So I think at this point we probably should stop because I enter into a whole other thing after this.

GARDNER: Okay, fine.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 3, 1976

GARDNER: Now, you wanted to begin with a flashback.

MALTZ: Yes, I wanted to begin with just a little note on Theatre Union. Margaret Larkin, who was the executive secretary of the Theatre Union but also its publicity person, began something new in the theater. She put notes into the back of our programs on the actors and what plays they had been in beforehand. This was the first time that it was ever done in the American theater, and it became something that all theaters have subsequently done.

In the spring of 1934, April I believe, the Theatre Union opened its greatest success, Stevedore, written by Paul Peters and George Sklar. The cast of characters was largely of black people in New Orleans, and we had an absolutely marvelous cast of actors. The reviews on the whole were excellent, and the play had packed houses at all performances. It ran for 111 performances, until we had to close in August because of the summer heat (knowing that we were going to reopen it in the fall, which we did, and which I will mention when I come to the fall). It is a play that I feel should be in more than one anthology of American plays, and I am convinced that only political prejudice kept it out--or, let's say, timidity on the part of editors and publishers. I have reread the play in

recent years, and I think it could be put on as written today and would again be immensely popular with audiences because of its enduring values.

GARDNER: What is it about?

MALTZ: Stevedore is a most eloquent dramatization of race discrimination in the South. The main characters are stevedores working on the wharves, and their wives and sweethearts and members of their families. It involves the possibility of a lynching because of an alleged relationship between--or of an alleged attack by a black man on a white woman, which the audience knows is complete nonsense. It had a marvelous humanity involved with its drama. It was the only Theatre Union play that made some real money, so that when in the fall of 1934 we produced our third play, there was no need for us to go out and raise money in order to finance the opening of that play. But I'll come to that presently.

In the summer of 1934, beginning I think probably in early May, I left New York in a secondhand Ford Model-A, two-seater car, with a little rumble seat, that proved to be a very durable automobile indeed. In the four months I traveled some 10,000 miles and covered a good deal of ground. My purpose in going out was to get material for a play on a rather famous, although now perhaps a bit obscure, figure in American labor history, a woman [Mary Jones] called

Mother Jones. She had been a very courageous organizer of coal miners, jailed not a few times, and I had read a biography of her and felt that I wanted to do a play about her. But in order to write it, I needed to learn about coal mining and coal miners and so on. I went out armed with two letters. One was from the New York Post indicating, not that I was a regular correspondent for it, but that I was a freelancer, and that they were interested in articles I would write. I got this because of a couple of friends on the newspaper--I.F. Stone and Sam Grafton. I had a similar letter from the New Masses. And so I was able to move either in ordinary circles or in left-wing circles with those letters.

The first place I went was not to the coal fields but to Toledo, Ohio, because at the time there was a strike going on in that city, and martial law had been declared as a result of it. This was a strike at a large plant that made parts for General Motors cars (I believe spark plugs and perhaps batteries, also). And in some conflict that I no longer remember, four of the workers on the picket line had been shot dead by the national guard. There was an inquest going on when I arrived in Toledo, and I was able to attend it because of my New York Post letter. I heard that there had also been a court-martial of a number of the guardsmen who had not fired upon the strikers when they had

been ordered to do so. And from sitting in on this inquest for a number of days, and from other things I learned while in the city, I subsequently wrote a short play, Private Hicks, about a guardsman who refuses to fire and is court-martialed.

GARDNER: Did you also do any articles on the . . . ?

MALTZ: No, I didn't do any articles on the Toledo situation. I did a few articles that summer on things I observed and learned. I'll mention just in passing that I was very angry at Heywood Broun, the noted columnist, who attended the inquest one day when I was there, because he couldn't keep his eyes open. His eyes were bloodshot, and since he was noted for his drinking and late-night card games, I assumed that he had come from one of them to the inquest. And I thought it was insulting for him to be three-quarters asleep. This was the same Heywood Broun who a year or two later took a remarkable role in the successful organization of the Newspaper Guild. He was simply marvelous in the way he behaved over a long, long period.

I think I might mention just for the record that the general labor picture in the United States at that time was that most working people were unorganized; they were not in unions. Wages were very low. They were thirty cents an hour or less in many industries. Working conditions were very bad. For instance, such simple basic human matters as the right to go to the toilet didn't exist, and people

could be fired if they broke off work before the noon whistle to go to a toilet. The employers didn't care because there were five people outside for every job inside. Safety regulations were completely lax and working people were injured and killed, and there was tremendous speedup on various of the automatic lines.

There were a great many company unions, which meant unions under the control of the company, therefore not responsive to the real needs of the working people. Wherever possible, the companies, if they owned the entire town in which an industry was situated, would establish [their] own company stores where prices were always higher than they were in stores in a neighboring town, but where the people who worked in the industry could buy what was in the stores with company money, called scrip. There was the very widespread use of instruments of intimidation and terror against the efforts of workers to get their own unions: for instance, newspapers who printed only the side of the employers, informers who would report anybody trying to organize, thugs who would beat up organizers or union members, and judges who gave injunctions preventing picketing within blocks and blocks of a plant or who sentenced people to jail, and such institutions as the state police of Pennsylvania, who were called the coal and iron police because they acted on behalf of the owners of coal mines and steel mills against unions.

There then was a very profound problem within the labor movement itself, such as it existed. That is to say, the AF of L existed, but it was organized on craft lines, not on lines of industrial unions, and it fought against the organization of industrial unions because it didn't want any change in the status quo. Or going into the Deep South there were many states where the farm workers owned no land; instead, they were sharecroppers and virtual peons, or half-slaves, on the large plantations of owners who would give them enough each year to let them stay alive in terms of food and a little money, but would see to it that at the end of each year the debt that they owed the owner increased. Now, if a sharecropper then would try to move away, the owner would say, "You can't move away until you have paid your debt." And if he still tried to move away, the sheriff was right there at the owner's request and would put the man in jail, where he could be sent to a chain gang. So you had the perpetuation of a form of wage slavery, certainly, if not the chattel slavery that existed before the Civil War. At the same time, side by side with all that I have just mentioned, you had a wave of new policies coming out of the Roosevelt administration that were pro-labor, and you had with it a drive for unionization and industrial unionization.

From Toledo I went directly to Pittsburgh, and I had a name or two of people on the Left in Pittsburgh (I no

longer remember who gave them to me; perhaps it was from the New Masses or maybe somebody on the Daily Worker). And there I saw the example of the tremendous effort on the part of some people on the Left, including some Communists I met, to organize steel along industrial lines. And they were as underground in their effort as members of the French Resistance were in fighting the Germans because they had to be afraid, both of everything that could be brought to bear on them (which I mentioned) from the employers in steel, and also from the leadership of the AF of L, which didn't want any change in the crafts that they had organized.

At that time I visited a girl I met who lived in Monessen, one of the industrial towns adjacent to Pittsburgh-- of which there were many all along the banks of the Monongahela River, a river that ran rusty from the issue of the various plants. And I used that situation to write a short story. The girl had a brother who was working in a nail mill and who, in his twenties, was going deaf from the extreme noise in the nail mill. And I used the home in which they lived, which went up about, it seems to me without looking at my story again, over a hundred steps from a street in order to reach their house. This story was called "Good-by" and was in my first volume of stories.

I went to various meetings of the Unemployed Council in Pittsburgh, and it was an introduction to me to life in

an industrial town. I then went down to a coal town where there was a very large mine, extremely large, and it was only about, I think, twelve or fifteen miles outside of Pittsburgh. It was called Library. There I had the name of a man who was a man from Appalachia, I would have thought, from a long line of mountain people. His name was Fred Siders and he looked very much the way Eisenhower looked when he came along. He was an organizer of the unemployed and of the national miners' union, which was the left-wing union headed by Communists in the mine organization--in mining. Now, that union exemplified an American Communist policy, which was similar to the policy of Communist parties of Europe, of establishing Left-, Communist-led unions. And within the course of the next year, that and all the others were dissolved, and the workers in them merged with the larger unions, which were able to be established under the more benign Roosevelt policy. But this contact with him led to the core of my play Black Pit.

He had a brother, whom I met, who worked at a coal mine some miles away, and the brother had been involved in a strike some years before and had been accused (I don't know whether justly or unjustly) of having dynamited the tibble of the coal mine. The tibble is the structure of a mine, where the coal is deep in the earth and has to be reached by elevators, and the tibble houses the mechanism by which

these elevators function. He had gone to prison for two or three years and, now that he was out, would have nothing to do whatsoever with any trade union. I took his situation and his attitude and from that built the central character of what was to become my play Black Pit.

I stayed in Library for a while and stayed with a miner in his one-room home, and then after a couple of weeks I went further south to a mining area called Brownsville, where I stayed a week in a coal camp, waiting to get a job. I'm sure it was very lucky for me that I couldn't get a job because, although I was young and in good physical condition, I'm sure I could not have handled that mine work. But I was allowed to stay there because I had to pay board and lodging. I stayed in the barrack for single men, and by staying there and talking with the men and eating what they got, I learned a great deal about what it was like to be a miner. Just hold up for a moment. [tape recorder turned off]

I summed up the portrait of so many of these small coal towns, which were company towns, in the preface that I wrote to the published edition of the play Black Pit.

GARDNER: At this point were you now sending articles back to the . . . ?

MALTZ: No, I had not yet sent any articles back to anyone. I don't remember whether I sent any things to the New York Post. I may or may not have. . . . I don't think I did at this

time. I would mention that somewhere along in here I also went to a town in Pennsylvania, or in Ohio, because I was given a contact of a leader of a steel union, a left-wing union, a man called Joe Dallet. And I went to a union meeting, a strike meeting--or a meeting of strikers--with his wife, Kitty. Dallet subsequently died as a member of the Lincoln Brigades in Spain and his wife, Kitty, I discovered years later, had married the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer.

While I was in Brownsville or Library, I forget which, I got a letter from the New Masses asking me if I would do an article on the situation among the farmers in South Dakota, where there had been some auctions of farms. The local farmers, under the organization of the National Farmers Union, I believe, had gathered and prevented an actual auction by buying the farm and its implements for one penny, and then giving them back to the farmer. This had gotten a great deal of front-page newspaper publicity.

And so I drove from Pennsylvania to Sisseton, South Dakota. Always, in traveling that summer, there were people on the road wanting hitches as they traveled from town to town, seeking work. And picking them up and talking was always an interesting and sometimes a literarily useful practice. There had been, in a considerable number of states that summer, a terrible drought which continued into the

next year. This was the era that we know of where the Okies and the Arkies went west to California because the land was turned into a dust bowl. And in South Dakota, while there wasn't as yet that dreadful a situation, it was very bad. So much acreage was just dry, nothing growing. There were cows who grazed right along the roadside because sometimes there was a little bit of grass along the road. There were numberless jackrabbits that would run out in front of the auto (all of the roads, most of the roads, became dirt roads; they were not paved) and would just run ahead of my car sometimes for forty or fifty yards before they ran off to the side. There were in that area fewer people hitchhiking. I think that the dreadful situation of people at that time was summed up for me when I pulled into a gas station and there was a car that had just arrived before me with some farmers in it; the gas station owner walked over to ask them what they wanted (and I think to say hello), and he put his hand on the driver's car door, and the door came right off in his hand.

When I came to Sisseton, I found a town utterly lacking in the kind of charm that a New England village would have [which,] even if it was in a state of drought, by its layout and its architecture, would have a lovely quality. This was just a wide dirt street with some buildings, largely unpainted, on both sides of the street, running for a certain

distance and then becoming country. The architecture was dull and there was just nothing attractive about it. No trees, for instance, had been planted because there was no way of really giving them steady water, although . . . no, this was not irrigating country so they must have had enough rain for crops. They would have had enough for trees, but nobody had planted trees. I remember I had a room in a hotel that must have been built around 1890, and it was hot and stuffy and so on. I had letters too; I had been given the address of two men, father and son, who were among the leaders of the National Farmers Union in that area. Their name was Walstad, and the father was Knut and the son was Julius. The father had homesteaded there about 1870, coming, I believe, from Denmark. And the son, who was then, I guess, around forty, had been a World War I hero, a decorated hero, who had a slight limp because some toes had been shot away. But this is important for what I will tell later: the town had wanted to name the legion hall after him when he had returned, but he hadn't wanted that. And now because of general conditions they were very active organizers in this left-wing union.

GARDNER: Let me ask a question here. At a similar time in California there would have been incredible pressure from townspeople and so on and farmers' unions against, first of all, the unions that were forming and, second of all, people

such as yourself coming in and looking around and participating. Did you run into any of that, vigilante committees and so on?

MALTZ: Yes, and that's what I'm going to talk about very shortly.

GARDNER: I anticipated you.

MALTZ: I was not aware when I first met them that there was building up in that area a great deal of anger toward the National Farmers Union on the part of certain elements in the society--for instance, businessmen, bankers, of course, who were mortgage-company owners, grain elevator owners, and a certain number of people who were just right-wing, or extreme right-wing in attitude. But that came to play a role which I will talk about.

While I was getting material from these two men in order to write an article about what they had been doing and what had happened there, I was asked by them if I would speak to some farmers at a regular meeting that they were having in a schoolhouse. And I said I would. They wanted me to talk about what conditions were like in cities, in New York and so on. The schoolhouse stood on untilled prairie land and about three miles from the main road, and to get there, there was just a set of ruts over the prairie. When we were coming back, a young man who was with us said he knew the road much better than I, and would I let him take the wheel because I

was going too slowly. So I gave him the wheel, and he got us out faster onto the main road. Now, the main road, which was of dirt, had also just one set of ruts, and cars used it going in each direction. But when two cars saw each other approaching, they were each supposed to get out of the ruts and move to the side of the road, and there was plenty of room. But in some way, while we were (the three of us--that is, there was this young man and Knut Walstad and myself) singing some songs, and I was looking out over the countryside, I half-turned and suddenly saw a blaze of light, and we had a head-on collision with another car. Fortunately, my little Ford, which was a touring car, I had put up the top because of rain, so it had this light frame which was crushed in but which saved us from what would have happened if it hadn't been on, because we turned over twice. And since I was sitting in the middle, I only received a sprained right wrist; and the other men, because we were packed in closely, had all of their ribs broken on the side where they were sitting, but nothing else for them. And this caused me to remain in the town for three weeks, because the local garage had to send to Chicago to get parts for my car.

As a result of this, I was there in time for a Fourth of July celebration, when there was a sideshow in town which brought people in, and some 2,000 farmers from many areas

came in. I was asked to be one of the speakers and talk more or less about the same thing I had in the schoolhouse, and I agreed. I was getting ready to leave at that time, and a few nights later--a few days later--I did leave, and so I missed a dance which the national union had in some local, two-story building . . . and missed something else.

In the middle of the dance, armed vigilantes led by the local sheriff raided the dancehall and beat up everyone they found there, excepting those who jumped out of second-story windows and got away. They also stopped cars on the road of people coming to the dance and beat them up. Now, I learned about this only later in a letter I received from Knut Walstad, who had not been one of those who was beaten up. But among those who were terribly beaten up was Julius Walstad and then, after the beating, something happened that was incredibly bizarre. At least a dozen of the National Farmers Union men, or more I believe (I'd have to check this in my short story; this was a short story called "Letter from the Country," which I based upon the letter I had received), were taken down to the union hall--no, to the legion hall, to the same American Legion hall that Julius's name might have been on. And there they were kept for about an hour while men and women, drunk, came over to them, abused them, put out cigarettes on their flesh, finally made them run a gauntlet, and danced around while they were lying on the

floor with their various injuries, and finally had them run a gauntlet where they were beaten again after they were led out. Now, I think if I had been caught at that dance as a foreigner from South Dakota--that is, someone from New York--I probably would have been left dead in a ditch. And who was going to complain and who was going to do what? But it was my good fortune that I left. However, the savagery, the ungovernable hatred that was displayed there was very important for me emotionally because it was a direct counterpart to the Nazi phenomenon in Germany. And it was one of the things, if nothing else, that made me realize that it can happen, it could happen in the United States.

Sometime that summer, and I no longer remember where it was or how it came about, I spoke on a platform somewhere . . . I think in a . . . I don't know where . . . maybe it was the outskirts of a city or town, in a country area. I know it wasn't in a city environment . . . with a very celebrated young woman, Ruby Bates (whom I mentioned before in connection with the Scottsboro case). She was one of the two girls who first had charged that they had been raped by the Scottsboro boys and later, through apparently a crisis of conscience and a meeting with the clergyman [Harry Emerson] Fosdick in New York, she had the extraordinary courage of going into a southern courtroom and saying that she had lied, and changing her testimony. She was a slender girl, very

meek looking, with eyeglasses; if I had seen her, not knowing anything about her, I would have said she was a rather prissy schoolteacher. But her readiness to face a perjury charge and to face possible lynching exhibited a type of courage that I never would have judged from just looking at her.

From Sisseton I drove straight down to the very tip of Louisiana, covering that immense section of the United States and going down through the Deep South, because I wanted to see what I could see in traveling. Now, I'll mention in passing that there is a story by, I think, Erskine Caldwell or Faulkner--I believe Caldwell--about one man or two men who stop for the night in a whorehouse and are not aware that they had done so. I pulled into a hotel in Kansas City; I would go to an area in an unknown city like that and just look for a hotel that said one dollar for rooms, since that was what I had been paying all along. I saw one such and stopped my car and went in and asked if there was a room. I remember, and noted at the time, that there was a very attractive girl sitting next to the desk in the very small lobby who looked at me with eyes that were like stone. I think they were the hardest eyes I had ever seen in my life, although she herself, as I said, was very attractive. And I got the room and I paid in advance, which one had to do. I don't remember whether I put my luggage up, because I ran out to supper and I knew there was a movie

I had seen coming to the hotel that I wanted to see. And when I came back to my room, there were a succession of knocks on my door, and one girl after another knocked at the door trying to find which one of them would interest me. I didn't realize until that had happened where I had landed.

Out of my traveling through the South there came a novelette, The Way Things Are, which was in my first volume of short stories. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] When I headed north from Gulfport (I went down as far as Gulfport just to see a friend from Yale), I headed for a mining area in West Virginia that I knew about called Scotts Run, and on the way I picked up an unemployed miner. When we passed through a town called Gauley Bridge, he told me what had transpired rather recently in that town: that the federal government--that a company, not the federal government--a company had been building a . . . gosh, I think now it was a . . . building a tunnel through a mountain, and I no longer remember the industrial purpose for it, but the stone which the miners had to cut had a very heavy concentration of silicate in it, and the men were not furnished the protection of masks. As a result, a large number of them, and including a large number in this community of Gauley Bridge, had inhaled such a quantity of silicate that many had contracted the disease of silicosis, and many already

had died and others were waiting for death. This resulted in my short story "Man on a Road," but it also resulted in my awareness that this was news that ought to be told, it ought to be written up. And even though I knew I could write it for the New York Post, I was then in such a hurry to get to work on the play I had been developing about a coal miner that I told it to my friends on the Post and then learned from them that there was nothing they could do to follow up on the story. I believe I told it to some other newspaper people, but finally I told it to a left-wing labor news service that I think was called the Federated Press. I may be wrong about that, but that's the best I can recall. And they did send a reporter down to Gauley Bridge and, as a result, in their weekly paper ran about six to ten issues--stories over six to ten issues--on what had transpired, and this resulted in a congressional investigation of what had occurred. In the morning that the debate on the investigation opened in Congress, every congressman had on his desk a copy of the Federated Press articles and my short story. I believe it resulted--I no longer can remember--I believe it resulted in some legislation concerning safety regulations.

GARDNER: Where was the story first published?

MALTZ: The story was first published in the New Masses and, as I look back upon it, why I sent it there instead of

sending it out to the New Yorker or Harper's or any of those which I am sure would have published it (because of other things of mine they subsequently published), I don't know. Maybe I thought, because they had given me a letter or something, that I ought to repay them by offering them something. Oh, I did during the summer write the article about conditions in the South Dakota area that I had gone to write, the article I'd gone to write, and they did publish it.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 3, 1976

GARDNER: Did you have anything to add about the publication of the short story?

MALTZ: Well, only that it is one of the short stories of mine that has been most widely reprinted. It went into The Best [American] Short Stories of the year of 1936, and since I look at my records, it has been reprinted maybe about eighty times the world over. But I think maybe at a later point I'll sum up what has happened to some of my things.

Back in New York I immediately plunged into writing the mine play that I came to call Black Pit, and immediately also into continuing work for the Theatre Union--the usual stuff of meeting with the Executive Board and making decisions, reading plays, seeing playwrights, speaking, and so on. I did interrupt my work to attend for one day a meeting of the longshoremen, their annual convention. I did this because I was very interested in the personality of the West Coast longshoremen's leader, Harry Bridges, about whom so much had been written in the previous year. He had brilliantly led a longshoremen's strike in San Francisco, which was one of the two great strikes in the spring and summer of 1934 which were successful; the other was on the part of the Teamsters in Minneapolis. And this was the wave of the future in American labor, because both of these

were industrial unions, and they were both led by militant rank-and-file union leaders instead of the entrenched bureaucracy of the AF of L, and both had involved tremendous struggles, and both had been successful. There had been killings by the police in both of them; nevertheless, both had been successful. Now, the longshoremen's union in New York, or the longshoremen's union based in New York, was the International [Longshoremen's Association], and for the moment, the Bridges union, I believe, was still a part of it; that was why he was going to come to the convention. But the longshoremen's union in New York was noted for its corruption, for the fact that the working longshoremen had to pay bribes to the men who handed out jobs on the docks, that they didn't have the hiring hall which was fair and took men in rotation, which had been established by the Bridges union in the West Coast, and that they were bitterly opposed to Bridges.

So, using my New York Post credential, I attended the convention. Now, I somehow learned, perhaps by meeting somebody outside (I no longer can recall), that no one from the Daily Worker was allowed into the convention, so I was asked if I wouldn't telephone a report of what was going on in the convention to the Daily Worker, and I said I would. While I was waiting for a session of the convention to start, a man who was unmistakably a thug and who was one of

those passing on the credentials of the reporters, came over to me and asked me to help him spot any Reds who got in there if I could--and I said I'd be glad to. This was a character whom I later used as a character in my first novel, The Underground Stream. The head of the union, whose name was definitely Ryan (and I think it was Joe Ryan), was a husky, well-larded man in his sixties, with a hard, florid face and unmistakable authority. He spoke quietly unless a different voice was needed, as occurred at one time when I was there when some one of his faithful followers jumped up to present a motion that Ryan didn't want, and he said, "That's out of order," in his quiet voice. The man went on, and Ryan's voice suddenly changed, and he said, "Sit down." And when he said, "Sit down." it was as though lead had come into his voice, and it had dropped a couple of octaves, and that man sat down so fast that it was almost comic. But one couldn't listen to him for more than a few minutes without knowing that he was a very formidable man.

I mention this because I was so profoundly impressed by the way in which Bridges behaved. He sat not too far in front of me and at a certain angle, so that when he arose to speak I could watch him in profile quite easily. He was speaking in an atmosphere that was dripping with hostility toward him. He had only, I think, two other representatives from the West Coast on his side, and everyone else there

would have been ready to hit him over the head with a club. But he had the courage and the principle to get up and present his case for about forty-five minutes--that is, the case for his union and for the reason why his union should not be expelled. I came upon a description of Harry Bridges in the book A Long View from the Left by [Al] Richmond, and I want to quote a paragraph from it because it's the best characterization I can think of. Richmond writes: "It was the first time I heard that sharp blend of Australian accent and intent assertiveness, free of rhetorical flourish but not devoid of argumentative device. I have since heard him speak at formal public meetings where he was meandering and disjointed, so that people asked: what's he got? Anyone who has heard him as the rough-and-tumble debater in a labor setting does not ask that question. To me, at that time, he was the articulate protagonist of working-class consciousness and militancy, of the power and the promise revealed in the general strike." (The general strike refers to the fact that after the killing of several longshoremen in their strike, there was a general strike of workers in San Francisco in sympathy, and that led to the successful end of the longshoremen's strike there.) But this is a wonderful description of Bridges in debate at this congress.

The Theatre Union reopened Stevedore in September of 1934, and it ran for another 64 performances--making it 175

in all at the Civic Repertory--and this is a successful play. It then went to Broadway for a few weeks under other auspices, and then we sent it to Philadelphia, Washington, Detroit, and Chicago. In Chicago it opened on the night of such an enormous blizzard that nobody came to the theater. The snow and icy conditions continued for another several weeks while we on the Executive Board debated about how much money we could continue to pour into this play which we knew could be successful in Chicago, but could not in those adverse circumstances. Finally we had to close it for lack of funds, and we lost money that we could ill afford. I read that the play was performed professionally in England, with Paul Robeson in the lead, but in London it was only moderately successful. However, the first two plays of the Theatre Union had played to some 300,000 people, and that was a considerable success for what we had set out to do.

Early in the fall, either in the fall of 1934 or early in 1935, I was elected to the executive board of the Dramatists Guild. The Dramatists Guild and the Authors Guild make up the two wings of the Authors League of America. This is the professional organization of all authors in the United States. It's not a political organization. It could be called . . . well, it can't really be called the union, although the Dramatists Guild is kind of a union, but it is the economic

weapon of professional writers in trying to promote their interests. And it was something that from time to time took a great deal of my time; but I had the attitude in those days that it was my obligation, when called upon, to do something for such an organization as that was.

Before the end of the year, my play Black Pit was accepted for production by the Executive Board of the Theatre Union. But before that we opened another play, Sailors of Cattaro, by Friedrich Wolf, adapted by Michael Blankfort. Friedrich Wolf was a German physician and playwright, and the Sailors of Cattaro referred to the sailors in the Austrian fleet who in 1918, I believe, had mutinied against the continuation of the war. And their mutiny had involved about six other battleships. But because of a certain indecisiveness on the part of the leadership and the sailors, the mutiny had been successfully put down, and the leadership of the sailors were court-martialed and executed. The production was a very fine one, but the play was only a middling success in terms of audience popularity; in fact, I would say a little less than a middling success. I think it had sixty-odd performances. Let's hold up for a second. [tape recorder turned off]

Early in January 1935 a theatrical event occurred that launched Clifford Odets on his career. On one of the Sunday nights that were held from time to time at the Theatre Union's

Civic Repertory Theatre, a production of the first performance of Waiting for Lefty was given. It was an enormous success with the audience that was there that night, very much a left-wing audience, and it was very well acted by members of the Group Theatre. In the light of the fact that Elia Kazan subsequently became a celebrated director in the theater and then a notorious informer for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, it is of considerable interest that in Waiting for Lefty he stood center stage passionately denouncing a stool pigeon who had informed on the taxi union, and saying, "Do you know who he was? He was my own brother." Since Kazan had been a schoolmate and a friend, I have remembered his performance in that role and what he had to say. Waiting for Lefty was an extremely well-written play of the agitprop type, and it ended up with a kind of euphoric hymn to the revolution to come, with one character saying, "coast to coast, hello America! Hello. We are storm birds of the working class." And this was marvelously exciting to the people of Left political sentiment in the hall. Although I was of that sentiment also, I remember that at that moment I did not at all feel the wild excitement that most of the audience were exhibiting because I felt this was, I guess, rhetoric, not really in tune with reality. And I mention this because of what I'm going to tell about the reaction to my play Black Pit in a little while.

The rehearsals on Black Pit began in February. As one example of Theatre Union policy, we made an effort to get as the director of it Herman Shumlin, who is a very well-known director and who had done several of Lillian Hellman's plays. Shumlin liked the play and wanted to direct it, but when I said that we could only pay forty dollars a week, he threw up his hands and said he simply could not afford to work for that money. The director was another schoolmate of George Sklar's and mine, Michael Gordon, who did a very good job indeed. We had an excellent cast except for the leading character--the leading character who was an actor I myself had strongly recommended for the role. He had been at Yale, I had seen him act in a number of different plays. Physically, he was very right for the role, but I didn't know that emotionally he had become so tight in the years since Yale that he was just unable to give the range to the character that the role needed.

I had the task early in rehearsals of teaching the actors the proper Slav accent to use, since the play demanded it, and it was not any more difficult, of course, for them to catch on than it had been for me, and they did it very well. [tape recorder turned off]

During the rehearsals of Black Pit, an extremely interesting phenomenon occurred: a rumor developed and then caught fire among left-wingers around the theater in

New York that Black Pit was the glorification of a stool pigeon. Now, it was indeed the study of a man, a working-man, who under great pressure becomes an informer for the company superintendent in a coal town, informing on his fellows who are trying to organize a union. It was certainly not a glorification. I would expect that, looking back, the origin of the rumor was the kind of malice that can exist in any social movement, or indeed in a bridge club. For instance, there were still some left-wing amateur groups who were continuing to train their actors and to talk about the theory of theater and who had not yet done any production--or if they had, it had been some performances in a small hall. They were envious and resentful of the fact that the Theatre Union had come into existence and had done what they had dreamed of doing but had not. Or perhaps it was just some narrow-minded idiot, even associated with the Theatre Union, who had started this. But before the play opened, there were a good many people who were convinced that this was so. And you will see how it was reflected in a review or two on the Left.

But the general reviews were mixed and mostly not very favorable, and in some cases, I would think, not very fair. For instance, Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times said: "Having finished with the ocean and the waterfront, the Theatre Union has turned to coal mining in Albert Maltz's

Black Pit, which was put on at the Civic Repertory last evening. Although it gathers into a redolent group a number of flavorsome characters and lightens the occasion with a few flickers of community humor, it is written in the old pattern of Bowery melodrama. In this column's opinion, Black Pit is the least original of the working-class dramas that have been flourishing on Fourteenth Street." That's the end of the quotation from Atkinson. There is no possibility of my quarreling with his judgment; that's his judgment. But when he begins in what I consider to be a patronizing manner and says, "Having finished with the ocean and the waterfront, the Theatre Union has turned to coal mining," he could say about plays of Eugene O'Neill: Having finished with the condition of labor in--what was the play with Waldheim [that] takes place on a ship and he's a stevedore? Hairy Ape. Having finished with labor and with the black in Emperor Jones, Mr. O'Neill is now considering the emotional turmoil of middle-class people. This is a kind of a silly thing but, as I say, I can't quarrel with his other judgment.

In the News Burns Mantle said: "Again there is vigor in the speech and a good theatrical foundation beneath the play. Again the production is of such a first-class quality there is no doubting the conviction of the producers or the sincerity of the play's author. And again there is the

familiar handicap of all propaganda drama, that the auditor of open mind finds himself wondering at what point the authenticity of the picture is to be accepted and the injection of the theater is to be suspected." Now, here we have something quite interesting. The reviewer is in earnest, but he knows nothing about the conditions of people in labor or coal mining areas. [He] obviously has read nothing about it, and he simply doesn't know whether what was pictured in Black Pit was true or not, and so he is standoffish about its "propaganda." On the other hand, he would go to see Sidney Howard's interesting play, The Silver Cord, which is surely a propaganda play in the sense that it conveys an idea or a message: namely, that people who are tormented by having a mother who tries to keep them tied to her umbilical cord have a need to break away in order to find independent lives. But he wouldn't call that propaganda because that concerns a psychological, emotional matter, and this concerns a social problem. Well, to me, philosophically, one is propaganda as much as the other--one no less than the other. And that's what one runs into.

John Mason Brown, New York Post, said: "Mr. Maltz's action may be slower than one has come to expect down at Fourteenth Street. His last scene may prove to be his weakest, and in his overdrawing of such characters as the villainous superintendent, he may have succumbed to the

regrettable weakness of most so-called propaganda scripts. But there can be no denying that he does succeed in holding one's attention in most of the ten episodes of Black Pit, that he does justify his plea for a union, and that he does compel one to suffer with his hero as he faces his dilemma." Well, I was not really pleading for a union at all. I was doing a character study of a man in a squeeze, and if he had been in a squeeze about money or a job in an advertising firm in New York, it wouldn't have been considered a plea for a union in advertising. This is what one ran up against.

GARDNER: That brings up an interesting point. When you were talking about Waiting for Lefty, you said it was an agitprop play, essentially. Of course, in a strong sense this is propaganda, but at the same time, as you say, it is a character study. Now, did you delineate between the two as you were writing it? Did you write it as character study in a setting?

MALTZ: That's how I wrote it.

GARDNER: Or did you have the consciousness of also doing a social drama?

MALTZ: Well, of course I knew it was a social drama, but let me put it this way: isn't Tolstoy's War and Peace a social document in the sense that the lives of its characters are played out against events as they then occurred in Russia, with the invasion of Napoleon and all that happened

as a result of it? One can write plays, novels, stories that concentrate purely upon interpersonal relations and that's certainly a valid form of literature. But if one chooses to present the interaction between individuals and their environment, their social environment, in crisis, that, to me, is no less a valid literature. But what one finds is that those people to whom the implications of that literature are socially unpleasant point a finger at it and say, "Aha! That's propaganda." And I maintain that the presence of an idea in a work does not make it propaganda, no matter what the idea is. I think it's a very false dichotomy. For instance, when I brought Fred Siders and some other friends in Library, Pennsylvania, to see Black Pit, as I did, they didn't consider it propaganda; they considered it a play about their lives.

GARDNER: In a sense, then, wasn't the Theatre Union the wrong place to have that play? If you see what I mean?

MALTZ: No, I don't. Where. . . ?

GARDNER: In the sense that. . . .

MALTZ: You mean, if it had been produced by the Theatre Guild?

GARDNER: Right, if it had been produced in a setting that hadn't the established reputation as presenting that sort of thing.

MALTZ: No, because the alertness of critics to a play about labor. . . . If Eugene O'Neill, then as now, the leading

American playwright, had, let's say, written Black Pit, they would have said he had turned to a propaganda play. [It] wouldn't have made any difference what the setting was. Although Grapes of Wrath was very successful, there was a great storm of hostility against that, an effort to prevent it from being made into a film. And sure, there can be crudely written plays or amateurishly written plays, which Brooks Atkinson claimed this was, and maybe he is right--I'll concede it. But it is not amateurish because it deals with labor; it could be amateurish because I was an amateurish writer handling those materials. Similarly, you can get an amateurish play about boy meets girl. The fact is, you see, that in the main there just hasn't been in American theater plays that dealt with the real problems of working-class people. Now, A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry, which was very successful, did deal with the real problems of a black family in Chicago. But when you had Stevedore you had those real problems not in terms of a son who couldn't hold onto money, as I recall it, and who lost it to a confidence man, which was easier for critics to accept; but in Stevedore you had the plight of black people on the dock who needed a union and who needed freedom from persecution because of their skins. And that was accepted as a propaganda play, albeit an exciting and good one. And to me this attitude does not bear any analysis, it breaks down. I think it's a false one.

Now, here was a man, John Anderson of the New York Journal, a very good critic of that period. He says: "As a picture of labor in a West Virginia coal mine it is vivid, richly atmospheric, and muscular. Mr. Maltz obviously knows what he is writing about, and having chosen sides, he writes with unswerving power and singleness of purpose. There are no two ways about it." Now, there was a man who reacted rather differently. And Robert Garland in the New York Telegram said: "Of all the plays the Theatre Union stood for and projected, Black Pit is the most theater minded, the least obviously propagandist" (contradicting Brooks Atkinson). And then from the Federated Press it says: "When Bill Stang, president of District 1 Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, saw Black Pit, he is supposed to have barely restrained himself from leaping to the stage during the card game scene in which the miners plan organization and strike. 'That's it. That's the way we really live down there. That might be me and the gang right now,' Stang is reported to have said excitedly." So you see, it depends upon where a person sits. Oh, turn off, please, for a moment. [tape recorder turned off]

The reviews in the Communist press reflected the rumor I mentioned, that Black Pit was the glorification of a stool pigeon. In The Political Stage the author, Malcolm Goldstein, writes as follows: "But the Communist party press argued

one point at length: the propriety of the dramatic use of the worker as villain. In the Daily Worker Carl Reeve took issue with Maltz for holding up to view a proletarian traitor without mention of the many loyal members of the working class and their equally loyal wives." Let me pause for my comment. If this is an accurate reflection of the Carl Reeve article, and I have been trying to find it in my scrapbooks, it's really a nutty comment because all of the other characters in the drama are loyal to the union, or most of the others, and it's just a nutty comment. Now, going on from Goldstein: "Joseph North stressed the same issue in both the New Masses and the Daily Worker, observing that it was better to give the workers a dramatic protagonist to emulate than one to revile." Now, my comment: this is a remarkable example of a desire to go to the theater and feel comfortable, and it is a curious counterpart of the attitude of those people in those days who would go to Broadway only to see a comedy. They didn't want to see a play that disturbed them in any way. And in the same way, these extreme left-wingers and Communist party members were thrilled out of their minds with the rather rhetorically funny ending of the Odets play--"Storm birds of the working class arise"--just as though that day had already come. That was the effluvia that came from the ending. And they didn't want to face the fact that one of the enormous problems in the American labor movement was the presence of informers.

As a matter of fact, as a result of all this there was after some weeks a Sunday night discussion of this issue at the Theatre Union in which there was a spokesman for the Communist party, an official one (I emphasize again that we were a theater group of no party and that our Socialist members were just as active in the group as those several Communist members). And so the spokesman of the Communist party, whose name was Clarence Hathaway and who had been a machinist for many years and had lost a number of fingers while on the job, just stated what I have mentioned: that one of the great problems in organizing trade unions was the problem of the informer, and that a study of how informers were made was a very relevant one. His position caused the rumor to die down. But nevertheless, the play, like Sailors of Cattaro, was not enormously successful. It ran for about eleven weeks, broke even, I guess, and then closed. It and Peace on Earth were both published in book form. The next play that the Theatre Union put on, and it followed Black Pit in the fall of 1935 [tape recorder turned off].

My personal activities were, of course, occurring in a world that was moving toward the explosion of World War II, and as a necessary background for my own personal psychology and emotion, I want to record a certain number of events which I followed with closest attention. I might mention that I have gone back to the very scholarly work, The Cold

War and Its Origins by D.F. Fleming in order to refresh my memory on the actual sequence of specific events.

In March 1935, Germany decreed universal military service. This was a violation of the Versailles treaty, and Britain and France could have stepped in with their armed forces to stop this, but they did nothing. Several months later, in June 1935, Great Britain signed a naval treaty with Germany, which also was a violation of the Versailles treaty in that it gave Germany the right to build as many submarines as it wished. It did this in spite of the fact that German submarine warfare had almost starved Britain into surrender in World War I. At that time only American aid and the convoy system had saved Britain. In 1935 Italy clearly was moving toward the conquest of Ethiopia. It was moving troops on a large scale to its North African possessions. England and France made it clear to Italy and Mussolini they would not impose sanctions, economic sanctions, through the League of Nations if Italy did invade Ethiopia. During this period Japan's invasion of China was continuing, and I believe this may have been the period (I can't recall exactly) in which forward-looking American women. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 3, 1976

GARDNER: You were discussing the political background.

MALTZ: In short, it became clear that Britain and France were completely ready to appease any Nazi or Italian fascist move; and at the same time, they were not responding to the repeated pleas and arguments of the Soviet Union's representative [Maxim Maximovich] Litvinov in the League of Nations for joining with the Soviet Union in collective security against fascism. And so the question is: Why weren't they? Just this morning I heard Admiral Zumwalt mention this appeasement of Hitler by Britain, and he said that it was because Chamberlain knew that Germany was strong and England was weak, and therefore he felt he had to appease it. Well, what Mr. Zumwalt, or Admiral Zumwalt, has never learned is that there was a fundamental reason for the appeasement, and it had nothing to do with the strength or weakness of the two countries. Because certainly when Germany had just begun to rearm, it was not stronger than England, and England and France combined could have walked right in and deposed Hitler for violating the Versailles agreement. And not only did they not need to allow Germany to do the various things I have just mentioned, but I haven't also mentioned that there were loans of money to Germany from England and, I believe, from

France also. They had a purpose and they felt they were achieving it: namely, moving Germany into the position where it would attack the Soviet Union. In so doing they felt Germany would topple or gravely weaken the one communist country that they had tried to overturn themselves in 1918 to 1920, and that they would do so without any cost of blood on their part. And unless this is understood, nothing about that period can be understood. In fact, the road, or the path, taken by both England and France would seem to be suicidal--since it turned out to be suicidal--but it was not a deliberate suicide on the part of either nation. They thought they were pulling a fast one and that they would succeed. Hitler, very shrewdly, in his various speeches and communiqués, kept moving, seemingly, toward the east at first, and kept promising that there would be peace between his country and England. And this was accepted. It was in fact only the Soviet Union and the Communist parties of the world at that time that I know about . . . maybe I've forgotten the role of the Socialists . . . I really don't recall whether they . . . but certainly outstandingly the Communist parties that kept saying this will lead to war. And in the United States, the Communist party of the U.S.A. organized the League Against War and Fascism, which became an influential organization with, I think, at one point about a million members. And this

perhaps is a very good example of how the Communist party or any other minority, let's say dissenting movement, at any point in history works. I want to pause for a moment for some observations about this.

The role of the Communist party in the thirties is frequently referred to as being one where the Communists bore from within in some trade union or some organization, and they got hold of the leadership by their cunning and by the fact that they stayed later at meetings than other people, and they worked harder than other people. This is a kind of absurd mystique which first of all makes of the other people who are, after all, other Americans, fools who have been led by the nose. But there are some very good examples in American history--for instance, the abolitionists in the 1840s were for the most part reviled in America, at least by the powers that be. They were not encouraged, they were slandered, but they maintained their point of view that slavery was wrong and was to be condemned, and they won people to their side because their ideas were sound. It was not that they were cunning or that they bored from within; if they had had unsound policies, nobody would have followed them. In the same way, Earl Browder, the secretary of the Communist party at the time, was not boring from within in the Roosevelt administration when as early as 1928 (as I recently learned), but also in Washington

in 1935 at a meeting of the unemployed, he proposed a system of social security. He was proposing something that was sound, and it's now the law of the land, and there would be a violent uprising in the United States if there was an attempt to take Social Security away from the American people. Certainly it's so that when the Communists have taken positions in any free country which the people don't want, the people don't follow them.

To leap ahead, there was an organization called the Theatre Arts Committee in New York City (and branches in other cities) which was led by the Communist party, or by Communist party members not identified as such, and which had come into being around 1938. It did skits at mass meetings, and it had vaudeville nights which people attended. It did some very funny things and some very interesting and satirical things, had some very fine people appearing for it, like Zero Mostel, Danny Kaye, and others. But in 1940. . . . And it had a very large following. When it wanted a communiqué to go down to the White House, I think it was about Nazi Germany, and sent a delegation down, the delegation was headed by Helen Hayes. But when in 1940 the Nazi-Soviet pact came about and when TAC . . . [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] . . . when TAC took a position of defending the Nazi-Soviet pact, its members left it by the hundreds, and overnight it became a nothing

organization. So that when the Communist party organized the League Against War and Fascism and found thousands of Americans responding to it, they were responding to it because they felt that the aims of the organization were sound. And that's the only basis upon which anybody ever follows anything. At the same time, the Communist party organized (and I was involved in this organization and knew that the Communist party was involved in it) the League of American Writers. This was in the spring of 1935--an organization that became a very influential one in the cultural-political scene in the United States for five years, and I will talk of it at greater length a little later.

Now, concerning the Soviet Union in this period, no thinking person--indeed no one who read the front pages of his newspaper--could be without some opinions about the Soviet Union. And this would have been so, actually, since 1917, when the Soviet Union was invaded by armies from France, Britain, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Japan, and by one or two divisions of troops from the United States. I might say it's to the great credit of the United States that the role of our troops there was largely an inactive one due, I think, in great measure to the humanity of General Graves, who was in charge of our expeditionary force and who apparently was repelled by what he saw of the treatment of

Russians by the various other armies. But from that time in 1917, there was an ocean of anti-Soviet propaganda all over the world. [tape recorder turned off]

Fleming, on page 46 of his first volume, in a chapter called "Communism Confined and Ostracized," writes:

"Beginning in 1925, Schuman . . ." (a scholar, I think at Williams) ". . . collected the following series of headlines in the Tribune." (This was the Chicago Tribune.)

This newspaper, says Fleming, "boasting on August 25, 1926, that it 'alone among the great American journals' had painfully but successfully defied the 'garbling censorship of the Red government,' published a stream of articles which would lead its widespread readers to conclude that there was a never-ending series of revolts in Russia." For instance, October 26, 1925, headline: Soviets Fight Famine As Grain Myth Explodes. June 15 of the same year: Claim Starving Poor Threaten Doom of Soviet. November 15 of the same year: Russians Free! To Rob, Starve, Murder, and Die. November 26: Siberia Tries to Shake Off Moscow's Yoke. March 26: Secret Report Shows Russia Near Collapse. July 30, 1926: Uncover Secret Terrorist Plot to Seize Russia. August 7, 1926: Rumania Hears of Widespread Russian Revolt. August 4, 1926: Soviet Party in Chaos as Trade, Industry Totter. I won't go on with these headlines, but they are an important example for this reason: after a while people ceased to

believe them. I remember that when I was at college, [Aleksandr] Kerensky, who had been the Social Democratic premier of Russia when he was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, gave a lecture. He proved to me and, I think, to others in the audience that Soviet finances were in such a state that within two months at the outside, the Red government would collapse. Well, then it didn't collapse. And so I and others said, well, he was so sure, and he convinced us-- what's wrong? And then there came a rather celebrated exposé of the New York Times role in this false reporting on the Soviet Union. The exposé was done by Walter Lippmann, I think with a collaborator. And the Times, as a result of it, changed its policy, and I think it began to change some of the reporting, at least, in other newspapers in the United States.

But the result of these years of phony reporting conditioned not a few people to believe that all negative reports on the Soviet Union were probably fallacious. Now, I'm sure--I know--that all negative reports were not fallacious. But I was one of those who came to believe that, if not all, practically all negative reports were probably fallacious. And "defend the Soviet Union" became the serious political slogan of millions the world over because at that time, without knowing other things that were going on in the Soviet Union, it seemed to a great many people, and to

an increasing number of people as they watched the Soviet role in trying to stop fascism, that the Soviet Union had to be defended against these new attempts to destroy her.

As an example of this, for instance, I want to quote a hymn written by Sean O'Casey: "Morning Star, Hope of the People, Shine on Us. Red Star extending till thy five rays come a'covering the world, give a great light to those who still sit in the darkness of poverty's persecution. Herald of a new life, of true endeavor, of common sense, of a world's peace, of man's ascent, of things to do bettering all things done; the sign of labor's shield, the symbol on the people's banner; Red star, shine on us all." Now, Sean O'Casey was a very distinguished man of letters. I don't know whether he was ever a member of the British Communist party, but obviously there's no question of where his sympathies are and one has to ask: Why did O'Casey write something that today many people would look at and say, "Why, this is idiocy. What was wrong with the man? He had a hole in his head"? Only if one understands that he wrote this without a hole in his head, with the deepest sincerity, with such gratitude in his heart for what he thought the Soviet Union meant to the future of humanity, can one understand the political activities and positions taken by millions of people in the world in the thirties. I don't know what O'Casey would have said before he died in,

I think, the fifties, but this is what he wrote in the thirties. And it is really a most profound symptom of the attitudes at that time on the part of many people. Since the Soviet Union hid from the world the Gulag side of its life, which first started to be officially exposed by Khrushchev in the year 1956 or 1957--I think '56-- (and which is carried to its height by the volumes of [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn on the Gulag Archipelago--since it was quite successfully hidden by the Soviet Union, millions like myself knew nothing about it. I would say that the self-serving propaganda of the Soviet establishment was something new in world history, because good and evil were so inextricably mixed in their society. It was a society that took a vast country--it was, let's say, a governing body that took a vast country that had been industrially backward and changed it into an industrial power of great strength. It was an establishment that changed 200 million who were illiterate to being literate. It was a society that brought universities to every section of the country where there had been none, who took the Moslem veil off the women in certain sections of the country and freed them from their oppressed status. And side by side with it, but unknown to most people in the world, it was inhumanly torturing and executing those whom it considered to be its political enemies and, even worse, imprisoning

or shooting or deporting into Siberia enormous sections of the peasantry who resisted government policies. But as a result of its successful propaganda, when the Communist party leader of the Leningrad organization was murdered in 1934, I and others accepted the official assertion that various prominent leaders of the Communist movement, who had been for years fighters for communism, that is to say, men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others, were guilty of this murder. [tape recorder turned off] However, as an example of what actually went on in the Soviet Union, I would refer readers to an extraordinary volume called Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism by Roy A. Medvedev, published by Knopf. This is the first available study in English by a Soviet scholar of the Stalinist system.

In the spring of '35, in April, there was a. . . . [tape recorder turned off] The organization of this league was signaled by what was called the First American Writers Congress, which was held in New York. And I hope before I finish these tapes to get hold of the book that was published of the proceedings of the congress--and a second and, I believe, a third of subsequent congresses--so that I can give a little more material on what was contained in them. For instance, I do know that among the signers of the call for the first congress were John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Waldo Frank, Michael Gold, Langston Hughes, John Howard

Lawson, others like Paul Peters, George Sklar and myself. And I remember that it was attended by people anywhere from, let's say, the liberal sector of society or by writers to, let's say, the Communist--those who were Communist party members. And it was a mobilization of people, not for economic purposes as with the Authors League, and not for craft purposes, although at certain times, especially in the second congress, I think, in 1937, there was an attempt to deal with certain craft problems. It was primarily a political, cultural gathering for the purpose of fighting fascism. I've left out the name of Lillian Hellman--I'm sure she was there--and I know that Dashiell Hammett gave a paper at the second congress, so I presume he may have signed at the first. And I guess--since I may forget it while I go through these materials--I ought to mention, since it is in my mind now, that President Franklin Roosevelt became a silent member of it. That is to say, he sent a note asking to join and that his name be put on the lists, and I heard this from the executive secretary--not immediately but later, although it was never publicly announced. The result of the first session was the election of Waldo Frank as president, first president of the league, and of an executive board of which I was a member. Oh, yes, I remember Malcolm Cowley was another of the signers, and I remember him on the executive board. But I hope to get

some more materials.

During that spring the Theatre Union board approved an adaptation by Paul Peters of a play, with music by Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler, called Mother. This was not the play Mother Courage, which is a better-known play by Brecht, but it's a play that was a dramatization of a novel by Gorky. Paul Peters had translated the play from the German and had read it to the Executive Board and as well had given us his suggestions for ways in which, by an adaptation, he would adapt the play and add some new scenes. The board considered that the play was gravely inadequate in its literal translation, and we would not have accepted it for production at all, but we felt that the ideas Paul Peters had were very good. We got in touch with Bertolt Brecht, who then was living in Denmark since he had fled from Germany, and he gave his permission for an adaptation to be made. And so we authorized Peters to do it. I'm going to talk about what happened subsequently, when I come to dealing with the fall of that year.

The summer of 1935 was one in which I spent in the New York area. By that time I had developed a relationship with Margaret Larkin, who was the executive secretary, and she had a serious illness and was in the hospital, and I stayed around New York because of that. And then when she was recuperating, she had the offer of a home in the town

of Croton, and I went up there with her for some weeks. I'll mention about her that she came from the town of Las Vegas, New Mexico (this is not to be confused with the Las Vegas in Nevada), a small town, and because she enjoyed playing the guitar and enjoyed singing, she gathered, without any particular purpose in mind, while she was a young woman there, cowboy folk songs. And after her graduation from college and working for a few years in that area as a newspaperwoman, she met some easterners and decided to try to come East, and arrived in New York with about ten dollars, a ten-gallon hat and her guitar, and got her first job singing cowboy songs in a Yiddish cafe on Second Avenue. I think it was not too long before she sang some of her songs at a party at which Alfred Knopf was present, and he said he would like to publish a book of them. And a book did result in which the musical arrangements were made by Margaret's friend Helen Black, whom she had met in Santa Fe. This book Singing Cowboy was the source book for a generation of singers who took songs from it, some of them cowboy singers in films who were well known. And subsequently, she took jobs as a publicity director in a strike that went on for many, many months in Patterson, New Jersey, and then for a textile union in Gastonia, North Carolina. [tape recorder turned off] If any material is wanted on her, what exists is in the Boston University library. I forgot to mention

that I used to urge her (and she never would) to join the Daughters of the American Revolution because one part of her family had come here from England starting, I think, in 1630 or so as indentured servants, and others from Germany around 1650. She had the entire genealogy. And one of the things that she had of her past was a sword that I guess a great-grandfather had used in the Civil War as commander of a regiment of black troops. And she had a flag which we used to hang out, after we were married, every Fourth of July, which had only about twenty or twenty-two stars on it--somewhat tattered, but very lovely. And to my horror, the flag somehow disappeared during the time that we moved, as we did many years later, to Mexico. It really should be in the university along with some of her other things.

This is perhaps the moment in which to make this kind of comment. There is among the young generation today a descriptive phrase of "a man and a woman living together" in what they call an "unstructured relationship," meaning that they are living together and they're not married. And it is felt that this is a new and radical departure in American society. Well, in fact, the bohemian, intellectual set in the United States in large cities like New York and Chicago and so on after World War I went in for that type of relationship. And among them it was considered very

bourgeois for a couple to get married. So that if a couple really wanted to get married for their personal reasons, they usually sneaked off and got married quietly without telling any of their friends. And interestingly enough, it was quite the accepted thing when Margaret Larkin and I began to live together. It was later, under the influence of the Communist party, that left-wingers, intellectuals, began to marry because the Communist party wanted its membership not to be unlike other American people who believed in marriage. So you have this curious turn of history in this area of personal relationships. In the fall I. . . .

GARDNER: What were you working on yourself at this point?

MALTZ: Oh, yes, I'm glad you mentioned that, because I had a note and I forgot about it. That summer, I know, I wrote the short play Private Hicks, and I wrote it really because the New Theatre League, which was an organization that came into being and published a magazine called New Theatre, had a \$100 play contest. I took a whack at trying to get the first prize, and I did. Now, \$100 in those days, I think, probably was close to . . . I don't know, maybe it was . . . I think breakfast, at that time, of orange juice, a couple of eggs, I don't know whether bacon, but toast and coffee, cost about a quarter. What would it cost today?

GARDNER: Depending on where, but generally two dollars.

MALTZ: Yes, well, mine I was just getting in a drugstore

in Greenwich Village.

GARDNER: I'm sure in a drugstore in Greenwich Village it would be at least two dollars.

MALTZ: It'd be two dollars. All right, so that's eight times--right?--twenty-five. So \$100 would be about \$800 today. That feels about right. Because with \$100 you really could do things. When I consider that I bought a very good suit in the year 1939 at a shop--and I'm going to talk about this later because it's amusing--at a clothing store on lower Fifth Avenue which deliberately said, "We have cheap prices," and so on and so forth; but it was a marvelously strongly made, good tweed, Irish tweed suit for twenty-five dollars--with vest. There is that comparison. So when I was after \$100, it was a lot more than \$100 seems to be today.

Now, since Black Pit had been done . . . oh, yes, since it was done and went on in February of 1935, I know that after that I was trying to work on a play, and I went out of town various times to a place in Connecticut I knew, but I hadn't gotten anywhere particularly on it. And I don't remember whether as yet I started to turn toward short stories. I think I did probably by the fall of '35. But in the fall I did a number of things that were important for me personally.

First, Elmer Rice, whom I knew from the Dramatists Guild, accepted the post of head of the Federal Theater [Project]

in New York, which had been newly created under the WPA, and he asked me to be his assistant. And I thanked him but said I wanted to give all my time to writing, something like that, and didn't do it. I did, either then or maybe it was a little later, agree to serve on the contract committee of the Dramatists Guild, which was the committee within the guild set up to prepare the ground for a new contract with the producers, and that took a good deal of time--a great deal of time to study the imperfections of the old contract and work out a new one. And I remember that on that committee were Elmer Rice and Owen Davis, and a man whose face I can see but I forget his name. I don't know. . . . There were about eight or ten on it, and I guess I was there as the youngest member to provide whatever that would give. But that fall I also took the most important move of all, which was to join the Communist party.

I had been moving toward that step, I guess, ever since around 1931. When I took it, I certainly didn't take it lightly, and I had to overcome some anxieties on my part about it. Because I think that this is something rather important that I have not seen written about and that is just generally not understood at large: to join the Communist party in the year 1935 or in subsequent years was to be aware that it might result in one type or another of personal harm that you certainly didn't look forward to. On the one hand,

everyone knew what had happened to Communists in Germany at the hands of the Nazis: they had been murdered, beaten to death, put into concentration camps, others were underground, others with more good fortune had escaped the country. No one was given any bonus of any sort for joining the Communist party. If you had a small career going, as, say, I did, you were not going to enhance that career; more than likely, it was going to be the opposite. You certainly received no financial return for it. You kind of closed off your thoughts to the possibility that the time might come when you would be treated as Communists in Germany were being treated, or as I myself might have been treated if I had not left Sisseton, South Dakota, when I did. But on the other hand, Sisseton, South Dakota, and a good many other events in the United States were signals of what could happen in the United States if people did not get together and work for a society in which that would not occur.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 16, 1976

GARDNER: Now, you had left off last time at the beginning of a discussion of your joining the Communist party.

MALTZ: I want to perhaps comment a little on my last statement. It is true that if I had known of the deeply repressive aspects of the Soviet system, I would not have joined the Communist party of the United States because the two were linked so much. And yet, in the year 1935 this contradiction existed: that even if I had not joined the Communist party, the political situation in the United States and the world was such that I still would have supported the aims and policies of both the Communist party of the United States and of the Soviet Union. My mind would have allowed no other choice because I wanted to stop the spread of fascism. I wanted to stop the spread of fascism and prevent the world war that I felt was looming up. The Soviet Union was the only major power struggling to do this, and the Communist party in the United States was leading the educational and organizational struggle against it here. However, returning to my actual situation, since I at that time had no knowledge of this repressive side of the Soviet system, I knew only the benign aspects as the Soviet Union promulgated them to the world. And since I believed that the Soviet Union on the world scene, and the Communist party on the American scene,

stood for humanity's hope for world brotherhood and peace and social progress, my conscience made me join the party despite whatever personal anxieties I had. It literally was an act of conscience on my part. And I believe that it was an act of conscience for, let's say, 99 percent of the men and women who joined in every country in the world. Now, of course I am not speaking of the Soviet Union or of any subsequent country where a Communist government was in power, because there would be many reasons, including opportunistic reasons, for joining the Communist party. But speaking of all the other countries of the world in 1935, the Communist parties making up the world Communist movement offered a glorious vision: that they would end man's inhumanity to man.

Now, I joined a rather special group. I might say that Communist party groups which have been referred to in many accounts as cells were never called cells in the Communist party: this was a term that someone invented, but it's a myth. Groups in the Communist party were generally organized on either a neighborhood basis or a job and industry basis. That is to say, if someone worked in an automobile plant, then that person would be likely to be in a group of other automobile workers. But let's say the wife of a man who worked in an automobile plant might be, if she were a Communist party member, in a group formed in her neighborhood.

That about sums up for the most part the way in which Communist groups were organized. But the group I joined was of selected professionals. It was very small and there were rather a number of people who, because of their positions in society, had to be protected from any knowledge, even among other Communist party members, that they were members. And so we in that group did not disclose even to other Communist party members that we were members of the party.

Now, this brings me to a larger question of secrecy. I not long ago was discussing with someone the whole matter of why members of the Communist party in the United States for the most part remained secret members during the thirties and the forties, aside, usually, from actual Communist party functionaries. One can understand why this was so by taking a look at history. For instance, from the years roughly of 1830 to 1860, no one who lived in the southern half of the United States and who was an abolitionist could admit to being an abolitionist without suffering very serious consequences, up to death through lynching. Now, someone who believed that slavery was an evil would gladly have spoken out about that if the society in which he lived were truly democratic and would permit free speech. But when your free speech can result at the least in your losing a job or a farm, or at the most in your being tarred and feathered and beaten to death, or shot down--as abolitionists were in the

South--then you keep quiet about it.

Or to give another example, in the 1930s it would only be at the risk of a beating or worse that members of trade unions, of secret trade unions, in certain communities all across the United States would admit that they were union members. During the years, for instance, in which auto and steel were being organized into industrial unions, those years comprising, let's say, from about 1933 to 1937 and '38, membership in a steel or auto workers union had to be kept secret. It was the only way in which people could be safe. Therefore, to charge the abolitionists, or to charge the members of trade unions, with being moles burrowing from within, or in being secretive for some, let's say, unpatriotic reason, is to miss the fundamental fact that they were not living in a society that permitted them to stand openly for what they did stand. A fully democratic society would, of course, never punish people who had radical ideas. The society, if it were truly Jeffersonian, would follow his principle that all ideas should have the right to be heard, and then they could be discussed and refuted if they were wrong. But some of the very people who would most loudly condemn, and justly so, the Soviet government today for its repression of all dissident ideas are blind to the fact that they themselves helped to create an atmosphere in the 1930s and 1940s and later on which forced Communists or others here

to remain secretive about their full opinions and organizational ties.

Now, the manner in which the party group of which I was a member functioned was the following. [tape recorder turned off]

GARDNER: Before you go into that, I'd like to ask, out of my own curiosity, I guess, what were the mechanics of joining? That's something that is cloaked in mystery as well.

MALTZ: I wish you'd ask all such questions like that that occur to you.

GARDNER: Oh, I will.

MALTZ: The mechanics for joining were generally this. Let's say someone was active in the League of American Writers or in the Theatre Union or in the League Against War and Fascism. . . . Or to put another example, one became friends with someone, and after some time and many conversations, one felt that here was an individual whose concerns for humanity, whose sense of justice, whose appraisal of politics were such that he might be a proper member of the Communist party. And so that question might be broached: How would you like to join the Communist party so that you can put your ideas at work in association with other people? Now, I don't recall whether I happen to have mentioned this earlier, but in all history where people have sought to effect any change in society they have had to get together

for a common purpose.

For instance, suppose the purpose is to prevent rheumatic heart disease in children, and there is a need for additional research. The research cannot be carried out without funds; to raise funds you need people to get together to plan programs, to educate in society, to have, let's say, door-to-door campaigns raising money, or to try and get some personality as . . . I forget his name . . . as Jerry Lewis, who is interested in muscular dystrophy and who raises so much money on a TV program. This is an example of social action. Social action by and large cannot be the work of one person. There are extraordinary instances, perhaps, in which it is, but in the main social action depends upon groups, and the larger the group the more effective it is.

This was a very fundamental argument, let's say, that brought me into the communist movement. If I really wanted to try and stop a second world war, if I really wanted to see fascism stopped from spreading, was I going to do it just by thinking right, by myself? Or was I going to join with others in action? And it would be that which would be presented to someone. You'd say: hey, how about you join the Communist party and put your shoulder to the wheel with others and become more effective than you can possibly be alone?

GARDNER: And so then you'd be invited to a . . . ?

MALTZ: Then you would be invited. If someone, let's say, might say, "Well, I've been wondering about it myself, but I'm wondering about this, and how about this, and what about party discipline, and what about the dues, or what about how much work there would be?" all of these things would be answered. And if they were answered to the satisfaction of the person, he might then say, "I'm ready to join." And at that point, usually, he was brought a party card and asked to sign a card (actually, in the group I belonged to, there were no cards. I did not sign any cards), and then was invited to become a member of a given group, along the lines that I explained before. Now, such a person might eventually become a . . . might quickly become a dedicated member of the Communist party or might quickly drop out of the Communist party. One never knew. Or one might be a member for two years and then drop out; and [one] might drop out and remain friendly to the party or might drop out and become very hostile to the party. One never knew. [tape recorder turned off] Have I answered your question?

GARDNER: I think so, yes. Now, I guess you can describe more fully the group that you were in.

MALTZ: Yes, I'm going to now. The group that I was in met, as I recall, once a week but it may have been (so long ago) once every two weeks. I'm not sure. But it was not rigid in the sense that, let's say, since we were small, if a number

of people had something very special that bound them up in time, we might skip a meeting. For the summer, since we were professionals and most of us left the city for a period of time in the summer or longer, we wouldn't meet then.

GARDNER: When you say professionals, what do you mean? Were they mostly in the arts: lawyers, doctors, that sort of thing?

MALTZ: They were a cross section of people--an educator, several writers, people in some other professions. Now, a meeting would consist always of a political discussion of certain current events, and there might be a presentation by the group leader of certain things; or it might be any one of the group who might have been asked the week before to prepare a discussion on some topic. Or it might be a discussion of a certain work of Marxism that we were reading in common. One of the members would always bring in the newest pamphlet or pamphlets, if there were some, that had been produced by, let's say, printed by the Communist party and some issues of Political Affairs, which was the theoretical journal of the Communist party, which we would then buy. There were always things for ten cents or fifteen cents, [that] kind of thing. Certain basic questions were discussed from time to time--for instance, what was then called the "Negro question" (which was the word then in use amongst progressive people, rather than black). That question was

greatly involved with the Communist position at that time which had to do with self-determination for the Negro people, but it isn't something I want to linger on now.

Or [there were discussions of] the "woman question." Now, the woman question, interestingly enough, let's say about thirty years before the women's liberation movement began here, was a discussion of women's liberation--not with the fullness with which we've seen it in recent years, but in its fundamental aspects: namely, that women should be the equal of men in all areas of society; there must be equal pay for equal work; there should be special consideration for working women who became pregnant with proper time off before and after the birth of a child, and proper facilities for child care if they went back to work; that it was the obligation of male members of the Communist party to see that their wives did not have the whole burden of household chores. When the man came home from work, since the woman had been working also, either in an outside job or in the home with children, the man could do dishes just as well as a woman, and to just sit back and read the newspaper, or read a Marxist text while your wife did the dishes, was not the behavior of someone who was trying to fight against the chauvinism in our society toward women. Now, this I think was very admirable and, I expect, little known. But I've known more than one household of couples who once were in

the Communist party who maybe have not been in the Communist party for twenty years, but where the sharing of certain chores around the house are still being carried out by the husband equally with the wife because of the attitude that they accepted which came down through the ranks of the Communist party.

And certainly at our meetings we would discuss the events in Europe because that was a time of profound and very serious political movements in Europe. Now, if some of us had certain problems or issues in connection with organizational work that we were doing and wanted to have some discussion of it in our group, we could bring it up and ask for discussion and advice. For instance, supposing there was some problem in the League of American Writers, that could be brought up. Or anything could be brought up.

We paid dues to the party. The minimum dues were always very small, I think something like a dollar a month for employed persons and perhaps ten cents for unemployed, or five cents. I no longer recall. But if someone was earning more money, then it was expected and encouraged that the person would give more money. And it was assumed that if someone joined the party they joined it for a good reason. And undoubtedly in a party group which was in a trade union, formed of trade union members, there would be discussion of trade union activities, and decisions would be arrived at

at how to vote on certain issues that were going to come up before the trade union. And to me, this is a perfectly natural phenomenon, although it has been described very negatively as boring from within and as being conspiratorial in nature.

I want to pause over this because these terms of opprobrium, I think, don't bear any serious reflection. For instance, let's compare the Republican convention of August 1976, where delegates came pledged to Reagan and others came pledged to Ford and where they maneuvered on the platform committee, maneuvered in the platform committee and during the debate on rules, and where, by the use of demonstrations and noisemakers, they did everything they could to win for their candidates. This is of the very nature of what all people do when they have convictions and they want their candidates and their ideas and their ideals to triumph. It is not antidemocratic, but it is a part of the democratic process itself. In a sense in which the terms "boring from within" or "conspiring to take control" have been applied to the Communist party, they apply with equal validity to both the followers of Reagan and those of Ford. But the terms are as false as applied to the different sides in the Republican convention as they are to the role of the Communist party members in different organizations in the thirties and the forties and the fifties.

To give another example, when at the end of the forties various trade unions led by Communist leaders were expelled from the CIO, obviously this expulsion was preceded by private caucusing on the part of those who did the expelling. Was this conspiratorial? I don't think so; I think it was the nature of the democratic process. And then we have as regular features of our national government Republican and Democratic caucuses in Congress. Therefore, if within a trade union there was a caucus of Communists or a caucus of anti-Communists or caucus of Socialists who then would present their ideas to the trade union as a whole, which the members of the trade union could accept or reject, there was nothing, to me, undemocratic in the existence of those caucuses. I'm going to go to something entirely different now, unless you have any questions.

GARDNER: No, I don't think so. I think you've described pretty well what the setting was into which you went. As things occur to me, as this goes along. . . .

MALTZ: Fine. Now we are in the fall of 1935, and my personal activities at that time, aside from my writing, consisted of my steady work in the Theatre Union, which was always substantial, my being on the executive board of the League of American Writers and helping to decide the policies of that organization, and at that time, I believe, being on the contract committee of the Dramatists Guild and with

others working to prepare a new contract to present to the producers association. And always, from time to time, there were other matters that would be called to my attention, things that I have forgotten. But such a thing pops into my mind as being asked to read the manuscript of a friend-- of a book or of a play. These were all time-consuming matters, and it brings me to something that affected my life deeply, and that was the enormous problem of my struggle for writing time. [tape recorder turned off]

There's a dictum that Thoreau wrote, but I unfortunately did not become acquainted with it until, oh, perhaps ten or more years ago, and it is this: that the cost of something is the amount of life-force that you put into it. And I believe that I paid too high a cost of, let's say, my life-force for too many things that had too little result. Now, the reason why I did it is because there was my great desire to write, on the one hand, and on the other hand, there was the tremendous pull that I felt of what one might call my obligations as a citizen. Now, if I had been someone who, let's say, was just unequipped temperamentally to work organizationally with other people, or if I hadn't had the ability to make public speeches, as I discovered I could, or if I simply had not had the response I did to the issues of the day, then I never would have had any problem in this area of finding writing time. But the history of literature

demonstrates that an enormous number of writers have been similarly affected.

For instance, Victor Hugo became a member of parliament in the 1840s and became less and less of a writer in terms of how he was using his days, and more and more of a politician as he saw his country being moved toward the dictatorship that came about in the year 1850 when, because of his opposition to the coup of Louis Napoleon, he had to flee for his life because there was a price on his head. He then after that was in exile for sixteen years, and while he did a great deal of writing in the course of those years, the first years especially were occupied with an enormous amount of just political work: of writing tracts against Napoleon, of meetings with other exiles to decide on policies, and so on.

Or we have Zola, who provides something very illuminating. Zola was a young man trying to make his mark as a writer in the year 1870, when the Paris Commune was established and when German armies were surrounding Paris. The only thing that apparently concerned him at the time was that the noise of artillery made it difficult for him to write. He was not concerned with the political issues. But around the year 1897, I think it was, when he became involved in the Dreyfus case, he was a completely political man, fighting a case of injustice, forced to sleep in different houses at night in

order to evade vigilante mobs, and finally forced to flee to England to avoid prison. [tape recorder turned off] And if one wants to follow out, if one wants to examine the life of Diego Rivera and the life of [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, you find the same factors at work.

As a matter of fact, a speech that I made in 1947, "The Writer As the Conscience of the People," is concerned very much with the activities of citizen writers and goes down the line of a great many writers who were so involved. In the urgencies of the thirties, I never solved the question at all; let's say I solved it very poorly, because if, as a member of the Theatre Union with a desire to see the theater keep alive, I was asked to go make a speech to the Finnish Cultural Club in Brooklyn, I might travel an hour on the subway and find myself in a hall where there were fifty people. And yet those fifty people might take a benefit and might sell 200 tickets, and this would be a help to our struggling theater.

And so when one enters into an activity such as the Theatre Union, an immense amount of work that you don't foresee accumulates and must be taken care of if you are not to fail the main aim. And so, involved as I was in that and other things, I know that there were periods of time--I guess as we moved toward World War II--when I might have spent fifteen hours of work a week writing and, let's say, sixty

hours doing other things which were concerned with social urgencies. What kept me producing was that my wife and I did take long summers away from New York, lasting anywhere [from] two to four months, and I did intensive writing in those periods.

GARDNER: In other words, what you are saying is that, in retrospect, you sold your writing short in a lot of ways by the. . . .

MALTZ: I feel that. For instance, the contract committee of the Dramatists Guild was a useful thing, but since I was so heavily involved in the Theatre Union as I was, I think I should have said, well, I've got to decide: the Theatre Union or the contract committee, I can't do both; or if it is the Theatre Union or the League of American Writers, instead of taking them all on. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] The reason why I say that I was wrong not to make a choice was that, after all, for every organization for which I worked, there were many for which I didn't, all of which were worthwhile. So at what point do you stop? And obviously, I did stop somewhere, and there was no reason why I shouldn't have stopped short sooner than I did--or shorter than I did. [laughter]

During this period I made a turn from playwriting to fiction, and there were two reasons why I did that. The first was that I became impatient with what could happen to

a play in production. One worked very hard to make the play the best thing you can, to do the best work you can, and then by selection of the wrong actor, such as a selection I participated in in my play Black Pit, what comes out for audiences is not as good as what you wrote. But since that's always possible in the process of transmuting a play from script to theater, I felt that I would prefer if possible to have the security of fiction, where what you write is what is printed. But secondly, I felt that I wanted to try and create characters with more depth and complexity than I felt the play form permitted me to do. (I can't say permitted anyone to do, because Shakespeare obviously created characters of infinite complexity.) But I felt I might achieve better results in the field of fiction. So I began then to write some short stories, and later I'll comment on what happened to them.

During this period a play I had written in the summer, Private Hicks, a one-act play, won first prize in the New Theatre League contest and was presented in a very fine Sunday-night production of the Theatre Union, together with a play by Paul Green (a marvelous play, by the way). And it received a great many performances in what we might call "new theaters" all over the country, which were left-wing theaters that sprang into existence around the middle thirties in perhaps thirty or forty cities in the United States,

Canada, England, and in one or two cities in Australia. (Interestingly enough, many of them began with a first production of Waiting for Lefty by Clifford Odets; it was the spark plug that excited people interested in the theater.) And a stream of letters began to come into the Theatre Union from groups all over the country, asking advice on how to organize a theater, how to sustain it, how to do this and that. And as a result, Margaret Larkin wrote a pamphlet on how to organize a theater, which was sent out whenever somebody wrote in with these questions.

I think I want to mention that it was, I believe, in the fall of 1935, or the winter of 1935, that I attended a trial in a Manhattan court for one day. Now, I must have done 100, 500 things in those days which were like this, not necessarily attending a trial, of course, but I've forgotten them and I've remembered this for obvious reasons. There were several demonstrations by antifascists when the Nazi passenger ship Bremen came to New York City. And in one of the demonstrations some of the demonstrators got on board the ship and were subsequently arrested and held for trial. I learned that one of the men had been seized by Nazis on board the ship, taken below decks, and castrated and then let go. He was on trial for disorderly conduct, or whatever the charges were, and I went to the trial. I remember his face: he was a tall, husky man, young. He looked as

though he might have come from one of the Scandinavian countries. And I thought then, as I have thought since, of the price that he paid for his political passion. I feel sure that if he had known what price he was going to pay, he wouldn't have left the dock and gone on board the ship. Why he went on the ship, I don't know. But this is a theme that later found its way into a film I wrote, Pride of the Marines--the question of the price that you pay for a position you take. And I guess that's all I have to say about it at the moment.

GARDNER: It is a theme that reappears not only in your fiction or in your screenwriting, but in your life.

MALTZ: Yes. Yes. As a matter of fact, there is something similar, because while I, in the Hollywood Ten case, knew the penalty that I would have if we lost the case, I didn't know that it was going to involve blacklisting and everything that happened to my writing career. So that it is somewhat comparable--not, of course, to the degree of what this poor man suffered.

GARDNER: Let me turn off the tape now.

MALTZ: Yes.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 16, 1976

MALTZ: I'd like to bring up a point. I'd like to go into a point that I forgot in talking about the Communist party. In the New York Times obituary on Dalton Trumbo which appeared last week, something was quoted out of his book Additional Dialogue. It was the following: "I joined the Communist party in 1943 and left it in 1948 on the ground that in the future I should be far too busy to attend its meetings, which were in any event dull beyond description, about as revolutionary in purpose as Wednesday evening testimonial services in the Christian Science Church." This, says the obituary, he said in 1970. Around 1970, around 1972, I think, '71, I listened to an hour's interview with him on KCET in which he spoke about political history, among other things, and he referred to membership in the Communist party as being akin to membership in the Parent-Teacher Association. Now, I don't know his purpose in saying these things, but they're nonsense. If anyone knew Trumbo, he would know that he would not have been a member of any organization for five years when its meetings were dull beyond description. He just would have left after the first meeting or [after] the second; he was completely intolerant of dullness. If the organization was no dif-

ferent from a Parent-Teacher Association, what was he doing in it? He had some public relations reason for making these statements when he did make them, but a moment's thought would reveal that he did not remain in the Communist party for some years for nothing. I've seen similar statements by other former members of the Communist party, and it's in part to correct these self-serving misstatements that I have wanted to explain why I joined the Communist party, and why I stayed in it, and why I cannot today say that I made a mistake in doing so. [tape recorder turned off]

Now, in chronological terms, I want to discuss the Theatre Union production of the play with music, Mother, by Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler. And I will mention that I've given the Oral History Program an article by Lee Baxandall called . . . [tape recorder turned off] . . . "Brecht in America, 1935," in which this production is discussed. In previous remarks I made about events in the spring of 1935, I said that the Theatre Union had authorized one of its playwrights and Executive Board member, Paul Peters, to make an adaptation of Mother. However, we didn't give this directive without consultation with Brecht, who at that time was in Denmark. We had previously written to him and gotten his agreement for an adaptation. And if we hadn't received his agreement, we would have abandoned the project at once. Sometime

in early summer, Peters finished his adaptation. In order to strengthen the play, which was rather fragmentary, he had used material from Gorky's novel Mother, upon which the play was based. He had turned the fragmentary play into one that had a solid structure, one that was warm and that had good personal scenes that we felt were missing from the Brecht version. We (meaning the Executive Board) were delighted with it, and we sent a copy to Brecht.

Now, since there was no airmail to Europe before the end of World War II, it took quite a good deal of time for the script to go by boat and then train until it reached Brecht--and for his reply to reach us. Presumably, he had to have it translated by someone for him because he didn't at that time speak English. So that it was the fall and we were already casting the actors when the letter came from Brecht attacking the adaptation by Paul Peters as a violation of the original and refusing to let us go ahead with the production.

This instantly precipitated the Theatre Union into a very serious crisis. Since we worked on a shoestring, once we set the mechanism of a production going, we had to use the money that we received from selling benefits to help us open the curtain, lift the curtain on the production. And consequently, by the time Brecht's letter came we had already sold benefit parties, we had already

promised a play, we had our small staff at work, and if we were to call off the production, we would have to refund the money, and we would have lost everything that we had expended up to that point--something that we could scarcely afford to do.

The decision of the board was to immediately send one of its members, Manny Gomez, to Denmark because he could speak German, and we wanted him to negotiate with Brecht. He left in mid-September and, after some days with Brecht, arrived at an agreement which permitted us to go ahead; but we would pay for Brecht's passage and expenses in the United States and New York, and he would be at rehearsals. And it was agreed between Gomez and Brecht that the Paul Peters version should, and would, be modified considerably. This was told to us by Gomez when he returned. Brecht was still to come, but we, I think, had already begun rehearsals, or were just about to begin rehearsals. With the exception of myself, the Theatre Union board voted to proceed with the production upon the basis of that agreement between Gomez and Brecht. I voted against it because I felt that if we departed from Paul Peters's adaptation and returned, even if only in part, to the Brecht text, that we would have a complete failure.

GARDNER: Why?

MALTZ: Why? Because I felt his play was inadequate and

that Peters had made an adequate play of it, a good play of it. But if you started to cut down the Peters play, you wouldn't have anything to be successful with.

GARDNER: How do you mean adequate and inadequate?

MALTZ: How do I mean it? Well, let me say that if we take a good Hemingway short story, I could do some cutting and some rewriting and omit things here and there, and instead of its being a first-rate story it would be a very mediocre story. That's the only way I can explain it. For instance, many a play producer has received a play and had a consultation with the author and said, "You have a good idea here, and you have a number of good scenes, but your characters aren't well enough developed, and you've missed the drama on a number of different occasions. It just isn't a whole play here. You've got to go to work on it. You've got to do a real rewrite." That's the difference between adequate and not adequate.

GARDNER: Of course, Brecht's comments (maybe I'm jumping the gun) and his perspective were that his was a new style of play.

MALTZ: Right. Well, now, let me talk about that in a moment, because I will get into it.

GARDNER: Fine. Fine.

MALTZ: Brecht arrived in mid-October, after about two weeks of rehearsals had gone on, and we had only four.

Now, Brecht immediately, or quite soon after he arrived, handed out to us on the Executive Board, or to people on the production committee (as I was), a statement in English, perfectly clear, on the type of theater that he was advocating--which he called the "epic theater." I wish that I still had a copy of that statement--I don't--but I remember its central principle was that a play should be a teaching vehicle, and that in order to teach properly, it needed to reduce the amount of audience emotion so that the audience could think and learn. Emotion interfered with learning. For this reason, for instance, it was his insistence that before each scene in a play, there should be a movie screen lowered on which the content of the scene to come would be stated in a short statement. Because if then the audience knew what was going to happen, they would have less suspense, and therefore they would pay more attention intellectually.

Now, although I understand in later years, after he returned to Germany and established his own theater, he began to modify this somewhat, this was his theory at the time. I thought then (and I think now) that it was nonsense; I think it's psychological nonsense and I think it's dramatic nonsense. This doesn't mean that produced in his own theater, with his own style, with his own actors acting in the way he directed them, that he might not have produced an effec-

tive theater, or an effective play. But he was advocating this as the only way in which theater should be presented. And that's why I say it was nonsense. To think that audiences cannot learn through their feelings and that they can only learn through their mind, I think, is psychological nonsense. And to feel that you must remove most of the suspense from a play, I think, is dramatic nonsense.

So that what happened then was a terrible clash between Brecht and ourselves. To quote from the article by Lee Baxandall. . . . I wrote the following in a letter to Baxandall:

Being the man he was, Brecht tried to take over the direction by badgering Wolfson, the director, with constant comments, by running up on stage and trying through an interpreter to tell the actors how to play their parts, or by shouting out in German, in a voice of thunder, 'This is shit!' He was a slender, slightly built man, but he had a voice that would have humiliated the fight announcer at Madison Square Garden; it blasted out of him. Conduct of this sort did not endear him to us. We were not only members of a theater trying to put on a play, we were individuals who had come together in late 1933 to try and create a theater of a particular sort. As unpaid, volunteer members of the Executive Board we had struggled for three years to make the Theatre Union a stable theater. We had raised money, made hundreds of speeches to win public attention and support, sat through a thousand hours of meetings, worked with playwrights, mounted four plays, and so on. Now we had in our midst a screaming banshee who had, we felt, sold us out by going back on our original agreement about an adaptation and who now, when we had achieved a compromise text, would not allow rehearsals to proceed without disrupting them. The financial lifeline of our theater was so thin that one complete failure could wipe the theater

out . . . Of course, we quickly put a stop to Brecht's grosser antics by threatening to bar him from all rehearsals. He agreed to keep quiet, not to go up on stage, not to talk to the director, and to limit himself to making suggestions to a go-between, Gomez, or calling for a meeting with the production committee. I can still hear, after forty years, his Prussian drill master's call, Sitzung--that is, meeting. We often had several a day. With all that was at stake from my point of view I came to loathe Brecht as a person. If we had met under other circumstances, I might have felt differently.

Now, I want to say that on Brecht's part he was, of course, a man with tremendous passion about his work. He felt that he had successfully maneuvered us into a position where, if he came over here, he would be able to win back every word of his original text and get the actors to act as he wanted, and so on. Because actually, he had directed all of his plays when they were done in Germany, or several plays that were done in Germany, and he directed later in his own theater. And what we were doing to his play was as though we were cutting his own flesh with knives. So from his point of view it was horrendous, and from our point of view it was horrendous. And as a result, the play was very unsuccessful aesthetically. It was not our version; it was not his version. It was by far the least successful of any play that the Theatre Union had put on, and the financial loss that we took from it was a very serious one from which we never really recovered. It put us so much in debt that from then on in the several

other plays that we did put on it was a terrible struggle to keep our head above water.

GARDNER: One thing Baxandall seems a little vague on is the relationship of the Communist party to the whole thing. He says that Brecht tried to influence the [Theatre] Union through the party.

MALTZ: Yes, well, I'm awfully glad you bring that up. I want to say, as an overall matter, that Lee Baxandall, who wrote this article, had the opportunity of going to living sources. Because all of the principals involved in it except Brecht himself were around to be questioned; and Brecht, on the other hand, had left textual material which could be called upon. In spite of that opportunity, people's memories are so affected by the passage of time, and by their own point of view, that on a considerable number of important matters Baxandall, from my point of view, is greatly in error. And so I made written notes on not a few of these points in the article.

On this question of the Communist party, I recently listened to a tape of an interview with me by a professor James Lyon, who is at work on a book called Brecht in America (same title as the Baxandall article). Lyon quoted someone else to me as saying that "Brecht was a one-man political party in close coalition with the Communist party." And I think that's brilliant, because it was always my

understanding that he was not a Communist party member. As a matter of fact, when he went back to East Germany, he retained Swiss citizenship and had all his money in Switzerland. Nevertheless he, I believe, collaborated with the Communist party of Germany before Hitler, and it's Professor Lyon's contention that he remained actually a Stalinist in his thinking.

Now, in this article by Baxandall, to answer your question very specifically, he refers to meetings that Brecht had with a cultural functionary of the Communist party, V.J. Jerome, whom I knew. But I never knew of those meetings, and I was fascinated to find that they apparently-- I don't know whether I found this from Baxandall or Professor Lyon--apparently Jerome and Brecht had a long correspondence for years thereafter. But the Theatre Union was completely independent of any party, as I said when I described its founding. There were Communist party members on the board, and several (this was when it was first founded) Socialist party members there, and known as such. The rest of us were not--although later, as I described, I myself joined the Communist party. But there was no. . . . Policy was formed by the Executive Board in everything, and there was never any consultation with the Communist party, with the Socialist party, in determining board decisions. So it may well be that Brecht had meetings with

one or another Communist, but that didn't affect any decision that we made on Mother.

GARDNER: Did Jerome talk to the board in any way?

MALTZ: No.

GARDNER: Who was Jerome, and what sort of things did he do?

MALTZ: V.J. Jerome was a Communist party functionary, an intellectual guy with some cultural background. (As a matter of fact, a secret writer of poetry, I believe.) He was one of the men who went to jail on the Smith Act, and after he came out, he was no longer a functionary. I think the party as then constituted could no longer pay a salary for him. And the last work he did was to write one book that was published, and one that I think remained unpublished, about his childhood. They were very sensitive vignettes about life in Poland. I wouldn't have thought that that kind of thing would come out of him because in my knowledge of him he tended to be very stiff and kind of a rigid guy.

But the Socialists on the Theatre Union board, to give an example, would have what--how can I say it?--they would have cut their own throats before they would have sat down in a meeting with V.J. Jerome to listen to what he had to say; they wouldn't have had anything to do with him. It would have violated everything in their principles to

invite a Communist functionary to advise them on what to do about Brecht's Mother. So it just wasn't so . . . just wasn't so.

GARDNER: Is there anything about Brecht and Eisler that you'd like to say that's not contained in the article or in your notes on the article?

MALTZ: I don't think so.

GARDNER: Let me ask another question. Did you have any contact with him later on? I guess not. I guess you would have been in jail during the time. . . .

MALTZ: No. No. Brecht lived here in. . . .

GARDNER: . . . in '46 to something. . . .

MALTZ: Brecht and Eisler both lived in California. I don't know about Eisler; I think Eisler lived in New York. But Bertolt Brecht arrived around 1943, I think, or maybe it was '42, as a refugee from Denmark. He was an old friend and had collaborated with Lion Feuchtwanger--he was an old friend of theirs--collaborated on one play, I believe. And they helped sustain him in California. But I disliked him so much from the experience in the Theatre Union that I never saw him here although I knew he was here, and I knew people who went to see him.

GARDNER: And you did know the Feuchtwangers?

MALTZ: I didn't then know the Feuchtwangers. I had met them once but I didn't know them. I only came to know

Marta Feuchtwanger after I came to live here in 1962.

GARDNER: I see.

MALTZ: And the only time I saw Brecht again after the Theatre Union experience was in 1947, when the Hollywood Ten, or the Hollywood Nineteen, went to Washington, and he was one of the nineteen. And just in a casual fashion I shook hands with him in the hotel in Washington, didn't have any talk with him, and that was all.

However, I must say that in later years after he established his theater in East Berlin, and I began to read appreciative articles by people like Harold Clurman, whose judgment I respect very much, I had a very keen desire to see his theater in action, even though I didn't understand German. When I went to East Germany in 1959 I was quite excited about the idea of seeing his theater, although he had died, I think, the year before. But alas, his theater was in London at the time that I was in East Berlin, and I couldn't get to see it. I did walk with a friend in the churchyard where he was buried, and that was it.

GARDNER: Is there anything else about the incident you'd like to add?

MALTZ: No. I don't think of anything else at all excepting that it put a terrible stone, a terrible millstone around the neck of the Theatre Union. Oh, yes, I want to emphasize about the Baxandall article that reading this after reading

some of the books on the theater of the thirties, I feel a very great sense of disquiet about the way history is written. I used to think that certain outstanding books--for instance, the book Jefferson and Hamilton by Claude Bowers was, I thought, an extraordinary picture of the struggle between conservative and liberal forces within American society after the revolutionary war until the time that Jefferson became president. The work seemed to me to be one of great honesty and great verisimilitude because of the sources quoted and so on. But when I read the Baxandall article with the feeling that he's perfectly honest in what he has written, and yet at the same time see all of the errors that I believe he has made, I begin to wonder how many errors there were in the Bowers book. And the same when I think back to the scholarly works of [W.E.B.] Du Bois, which I have regarded as so fine, or of the Fleming book, The Origins of the Cold War, and I begin to feel that, well, the best that we can ever get is a certain percentage of truth, and that total truth must elude us in probing into the past. [tape recorder turned off]

I want to add a postscript on the play Mother. It only played for thirty-six performances, and we canceled the benefits that remained and returned the money. We were then in a very, very difficult situation but were able to help ourselves out by the fact that we transferred to our

theater a play that was failing on Broadway. It was called Let Freedom Ring, written by Albert Bein. This was a play based upon a novel which had to do with a textile strike in the South, and although it was not securing adequate audiences to continue on Broadway, we felt that it would be liked by what we called in a broad fashion "our audience." And arrangements were made to bring it into our theater. As a result, after it had been ready to close on Broadway following twenty-nine performances, it ran for seventy-nine in our theater, and it helped us pay the rent and keep our staff going while we prepared our next production.

GARDNER: Do you think it was a mistake, looking back, to have produced Mother?

MALTZ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I look back with what I would call no pleasure in the fact that I did vote against producing it. We would have been much better off as a theater if we had not done it--not just financially but in terms of critics and in terms of audience. Because with the humanity largely taken out of the play and with its being such a mixture aesthetically, such a bad mixture aesthetically, it was no good. It was most unfortunate.

In the year 1936, I continued to write short stories and some novelettes, and they began to get publication. I had a story published in Scribner's, another one in New Masses.

GARDNER: Which ones?

MALTZ: The Scribner's was called "The Game"; the New Masses, a story called "Good-by." In the course of once going to a meeting on the Dramatists Guild contract matters at the home of Elmer Rice, I stepped out of a subway to see some cops struggling with a drunken man, and that resulted in a short story "Incident on a Street Corner" which was published in the New Yorker. (I might add that when I went into Elmer Rice's apartment, which was in a residential hotel on Broadway in the mid-seventies, as I recall, it was my first experience, that I remember, in seeing walls covered with art. I had never been in a home of that sort in my life, that I can recall, and he had a collection of what I can now recall were quite celebrated names of modernists, and I just never knew of that phenomenon.)

At that time also there began for me the reprinting of some of my short stories: for instance, earlier in 1936 "Man on a Road" was reprinted in The Best Short Stories of that year and in Scholastic magazine. I mentioned that because the reprinting of my short stories, which continued throughout the thirties and forties, stopped dead once the Hollywood Ten case began.

In March of that year, the Theatre Union opened what I regarded as a very interesting play, Bitter Stream, which was a dramatization by one of our board members, Victor Wolfson, who had directed Mother, of a novel by the Italian

author [Ignazio] Silone, called Fontamara, an excellent novel. And by the way, this is an interesting little footnote to the political nature of the Theatre Union. Silone had been a leading Italian Communist who had broken with the Communist movement and was now anti-Communist, and we were doing his book. Now obviously, if we had been an arm, the theater arm, of the Communist party, we wouldn't have done such a production. The play was only moderately successful, however, and it ran for . . . I'm trying to see here . . . it didn't have too long a run, probably some seventy performances or so, which means about nine weeks. A play like that is not a failure, but it certainly isn't a real success, and for the Theatre Union it meant that our debt constantly rose. I think that probably about the time Bitter Stream closed we must have had a total indebtedness of perhaps about \$10,000, which for us was a great deal of money. This meant, let's say, certain printing bills which we had not paid--we were paying on the bills but we were not clearing them up, and certain other bills like that. Perhaps we were a little behind in our rent, I don't know.

Around this time we learned to our great dismay that we were no longer going to be able to continue in the Civic Repertory Theatre because the bank that owned the theater had decided that it could make more money by having a parking lot; they were going to tear down the theater.

And in a little footnote I might mention that Victor Wolfson and I went down to see a young man in a bank who had an executive position, and we implored him to let us continue to stay there. We tried to persuade him by telling him the kind of theater we were, that we who were on the Executive Board were working without any money. He just stared at us as though we had come from a foreign planet and kept asking, "But why are you working if you are not paid?" And we tried to convey the fact that we were doing something that we considered important and that we were willing to do it without remuneration, but he couldn't comprehend it, just couldn't comprehend it. It did no good in getting the bank to change anything, so we began to look for another theater into which we could go. Because by that time, probably, I believe we had already read and decided upon, or were in the process of deciding upon, our next play, and had decided on a play Marching Song by John Howard Lawson.

That summer Margaret Larkin and I spent in Westport, Connecticut, and moved in together for the first time. I spent most of the summer writing, excepting for certain Theatre Union work, and perhaps some other things that I no longer recall, and in the fall we settled on West Twentieth Street in New York, between Eighth and Ninth avenues. It was a small apartment. I guess it had three rooms and a kitchen so that it provided working space for both of us,

since she needed working space at home as well as I. But I mention the area because that will come in later in reference to the struggle I became involved in against Coughlinism. Now, since it was the year 1936 I think it's very relevant to pause to give some of the political background at that time.

GARDNER: Before you do, I'm going to turn over my tape, and then we can pick it up without interrupting you.

MALTZ: All right. Fine.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 15, 1978

GARDNER: You were about to set the political background of the year.

MALTZ: Yes, of the year 1936. In March 1936 Hitler occupied the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. England and France made no move about this, and Hitler promptly fortified the frontier with France and Belgium. I want to read now from The Cold War and Its Origins, by Fleming, page 62:

French surrender to this militarization of the Rhineland opened wide the fascist assault on France. Having locked his own front door, Hitler, along with Mussolini, now boldly took possession of France's back door and in the process killed what was left of French spirit.

Nor was any time lost. In July 1936 a Rightist revolt was begun against the Popular Front Government of the Spanish Republic. The rebellion was planned in Berlin and Rome as well as in Spain, and was instantly given military support by both Germany and Italy.

This move into Spain struck straight at the very life of France and equally directly at the imperial interests of both Britain and France. Axis control of Spain threatened Britain's "life line" through the Mediterranean as sharply as it could be done. Spain in the Axis camp also put France in mortal peril of having her communications with her African colonies cut, at the same time that she was surrounded by fascist states on all sides.

In this situation every instinct of self-preservation called for a firm British-French union to defeat this dangerous thrust to their very existence. For France especially the issue was mortal. Yet outwardly it was France in the person of Léon Blum, Socialist Premier of a Popular Front cabinet, which took the first step toward appeasing the Axis

with non-intervention. . . !

Britain at once insisted that the Non-Intervention Committee meet in London instead of Geneva. Some twenty-seven European governments were invited to join, and did so. This amounted to organizing a new ad hoc League of Nations under British control. The committee adopted an attitude of trying to prevent any military help from reaching either side-- a completely new departure in international law and usage. The Spanish Government was a democratic one, legally elected by the whole Spanish people. By all past precedent it had the right to buy arms for its defense anywhere. It would be the insurgents who would have all the difficulties and be discriminated against, but this traditional situation was completely reversed. The Government was reduced to the same level as the rebels. Its fight for survival against its own rebels, plus Italy and Germany, was placed on the same moral basis as that of the rebels and the foreign governments intervening.

Embargoes on arms were laid against both sides. The democracies, with spasmodic exceptions in France, obeyed the rules. The Axis didn't. Italy sent everything she had, including troops totaling upwards of 100,000 men. . . .

Germany sent technicians, equipment of every kind, and troops. The Germans used the Spanish Republicans as guinea pigs upon which to test all of the new arms they were preparing to use on Europe. The bombing of Guernica, on April 26, 1937, was the classic example of this policy. Guernica was a town of several thousand people in the Basque country. It was not on any military front, but it was a sacred place to the Basque people. Its destruction would be a heavy moral blow to them, so the German aviators came on market day, when the town was crowded with peasants and ruthlessly obliterated the whole place. Then as the people fled out on a hub of roads they machine-gunned and bombed the roads. . . .

On five separate occasions, covering a period of two years, the Spanish Government appealed to the League of Nations for help against the organized aggression of the Axis, but always in vain. . . . Only Soviet Russia spoke out plainly and strongly in Spain's behalf.

The Spanish Government first called the League's attention to the international war which was raging in Spain on September 25, 1936. The warning was carefully ignored. Another appeal, when full docu-

mentary proof of Axis intervention was available, led only to a resolution hoping that "Non-Intervention" would be made stronger. [sound interference--tape recorder turned off]

In May 1937 Spain appealed again to the League of Nations, whose Covenant was stern about intervention in any state's domestic affairs, as well as definite on what to do about international aggression. On May 28 Litvinov spoke, citing the indisputable evidence presented of armed intervention, reminding the Council that the Spanish Government would have coped with the rebellion long ago, if left alone, and warning that the safety of every European state was at stake.

That's the end of the quotation from the Fleming book.

For myself, the importance of reading from Fleming this way was that it was events like this that cemented my loyalty to the Communist party and the world communist movement, and my support of what I considered to be the principled position of the Soviet Union. It was Russian aid to the Spanish republic, at great cost to itself because its arms were not being paid for, and not a few of its ships bearing arms were sunk by German and Italian submarines on their way to Spain, that was keeping the republic alive. It was the communist movement of the world that organized the International Brigades of volunteers who came from a great many countries in support of the republic, numbered some 35,000 men, much more than half of whom died there. Not all of them, of course, were Communists; many were non-Communist antifascists. My sense of patriotism, of American patriotism, was seriously wounded by the

Roosevelt policy of acquiescing in nonintervention, which was such a grisly farce, and refusing to sell arms for cash to the republic. Now, this, of course, Roosevelt did because of the Catholic vote in the United States. The Catholic Church had taken a very strong pro-Franco stand even though there were many individual priests on the side of the republic; but with his awareness of the Catholic vote, this is what Roosevelt did. However, all of this, in the view of the communist world movement, was contributing to the advent of inevitable war later on, and this was proved to be absolutely true. These events also helped explain why in 1940 the Soviet Union entered into a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, and I will be talking of that when I come to that year in my narrative. That's it.

SECOND PART (September 16, 1978)

GARDNER: When we left off we were talking about the impact of the Spanish civil war on not only yourself but a generation.

MALTZ: Yes, I think that this generation of Americans born since World War II can understand that impact best by recalling its own reaction to the war in Vietnam. Certainly the intensity of our feelings about the Spanish civil war was the same. But in addition there was an absolutely extraordinary phenomenon in that war which, to my best knowledge, has had no precedent in the world: some 40,000 foreigners volunteered to fight on behalf of the Loyalist cause in Spain. They became the International Brigades.

These men came from France, from England, from Yugoslavia, Poland, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia. They came from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Holland, and many other countries; among them, and among the best of all fighters, were German and Italian refugees from fascism who were in exile in different countries. Often it required tremendous persistence on their part to get into Spain; in almost every case they had to climb the Pyrenees from the French side of the border and evade customs agents in order to be able to do it. And of their number, half died. In terms of the casualty lists of modern armies, this is an

enormous percentage; and of the rest, most were wounded once, twice, and three times. This is the real measure of what that civil war meant to us.

GARDNER: Did you have any close associates who were. . . ?

MALTZ: Oh, yes. I had friends who went and died there, and friends who went and came back. And this was a very intimate thing. Those who didn't go did everything we could to organize support for the Loyalists. I think I may have mentioned in the discussion before that this was one of the terrible blots on American history, that our government did nothing, and by doing nothing, indirectly was lending its support to the fascist countries. However, I'll now go on to something else.

In discussing Mother, I discovered that I omitted a physical description of Brecht. He's a man about five-feet-six-inches tall, very slender. He was largely bald except for short, stiff, black hair around the sides and back of his head. He had blue eyes behind wire eyeglasses that had been made centuries ago. They were an antique from, I think, the Middle Ages, and he was extremely proud of them. The first time I met him he saw me looking at them. He took them off to show me what they were and to tell me. He always was dressed like a workingman, wearing a black leather jacket and no tie. (And that always amused me a little bit because at least in the United States and, I should imagine,

in Germany as well, when a workingman was ready to go somewhere on Sunday, his day off, he put on his best suit of clothes, and he indeed wore a tie.) Joe Losey said about Brecht in print that "he ate little, drank little and fornicated a lot."

I don't know whether I mentioned that it was almost intolerable for me to sit next to him in the theater. Did I mention this? Did I mention the fact that Marta Feuchtwanger told me he had an organic condition of which he had no control? Ah, maybe I learned it only since. I always thought he simply was one of those people who do not wash. But this is not true. Apparently he was afflicted with a condition in which a very distressing odor came from his feet, and he had no control over that. I have heard of this before, and this is what he had, so it was not his fault in any way.

Now, on the previous tape I mentioned writing several novelettes during the summer in Westport in 1936, but I also wrote a number of short stories which I'll mention when I come to their publication the following year. But it is germane to say now that none of this writing came easy to me: writing a story was a constant wrestling match to find the means of expressing myself, of handling the materials, of finding my style, and of studying other writers. I also rewrote a great deal. Now, I'm sure that 95 percent or more

of all writers go through the same process, and I merely make mention of it so that I don't pass lightly over the fact of saying, "Well, I wrote such and such." That phrase represents many hours of intense work.

GARDNER: What was the procedure you followed? Did you write a number of pages, then go back and rewrite them? Did you write a page at a time and work on it?

MALTZ: My method usually was to try and get each page right as I went along. Now, that might mean there was no one pattern to it. It might mean that I would write a paragraph and make some changes, or perhaps start over and rewrite it again and constantly rewrite. Perhaps by the end of one work session, which might have been anywhere from two to five hours, I might have several pages. Well, the next day I might change them all again and constantly rewrite, and I might be on those several pages for one week; or it might come more rapidly than that. I might have a story finished within one week and then find that I made more changes. But it was always a process of writing and re-writing, and I was never one of those few people, few writers (and there are some), who are able to write and don't have to rewrite at all. They are very rare.

GARDNER: Did you generally stick to one project at a time? I mean if you were in the middle of a short story and thought of something that was exceptionally interesting, did you

remain with the first short story?

MALTZ: Yes, usually I would just write down the new idea. I was constantly getting ideas, whether they were good or not. I would say for everything I have written and published, I probably had at least a hundred other ideas. Now, as I say, maybe they weren't good, but some of them probably would have been.

GARDNER: That's an awesome number.

MALTZ: Well, but the number is correct. When I say a hundred, that's true. I just put them into files, and I have files and files and files; I've never thrown them away, and they'll just go into the garbage somewhere, sometime, I don't know, into a university, something or other. [laughter] But that has happened. Now, I wonder if I. . . . This might be a moment to speak of--to your recollection, have I spoken of the myth of the lonely writer?

GARDNER: I couldn't say. It's probably safer to say no so that you'll speak about it.

MALTZ: Yes, and then we can cut it out. I don't know how this myth--and there are a lot of myths in the world that people continue--I don't know how the myth of the lonely writer has crept up, but it's inevitable that anyone reading writers talking about their own work will hear them say, "Oh, writing is such a lonely business." Now, this self-serving glorification is nonsense from several points of view. In

the first place, there are an enormous amount of professions or types of work in which people are alone. A house painter painting rooms is alone, usually alone all day, painting. A physicist working with a pencil and paper on mathematical problems is alone. A forest ranger looking for forest fires is alone. A street sweeper is alone. I don't think I really have to go down and mention more types of work than that for people to recognize that this is so--that there are a great many such things. And secondly, if you are absorbed very much in the work you are doing, time goes rapidly. You don't feel you're alone; you're fully preoccupied. If you're having a nice swim, you don't say, "Oh, what a lonely thing it is to be swimming." You don't have to swim hand in hand with somebody to enjoy swimming, and, if anything, you don't want anyone intruding when you're doing something that you are concerned about. Even if you are reading, you read by yourself; you don't want someone popping his head in every five minutes and saying, "Do you feel lonely?" You don't feel lonely.

There is perhaps one aspect in which writing differs from most professions and that is in the length of time that it sometimes takes to complete a work. Sometimes a novel can take, as it did, say, with Flaubert (although that's unusual), seven years for the completion of Madame Bovary. And that's a long time to see the completion of a piece of

work. Even if it is only one year, it is a considerable piece of time. But, of course, scientists work at a research problem for five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years. A historian will work years on a piece of work, and so will others. So even though that makes it different in kind from, let's say, the fire watcher who may see a fire once a week, or the street sweeper who goes home at the end of the day and has his work finished, nevertheless it doesn't mean that the writer has any reason to stand up on a platform and say, "Oh, what a lonely, harsh life I have." And I just want to kill that particular myth.

There are other myths, by the way which. . . .

I went out to the mine fields, hearing first that miners-- (maybe I'll put this in also)--were all pale because they didn't see the sun. Well, miners aren't pale, because if they're well fed they have color in their cheeks. And two, I had read that miners have little pock marks on their faces from the dynamite that they use in blasting. When I asked one of the miners about that, he said, "Hell, if you got close enough to dynamite to get pock marks on your face, it would blow your head off!" So those two myths went by the board. Then most recently, just this past year, I read an article in the New Yorker about a study of men in prison which spoke of men with prison pallor. Well, that's nonsense too: if they have an adequate diet, then they don't have

any pallor just because they are in cells.

GARDNER: Perhaps they don't have adequate diet.

MALTZ: Well, that could be, that could be. But it would only be from diet. But I don't think the diet is that bad, actually--it's not enjoyable, but I don't think it's that bad. However, I'll go on to another point.

I haven't yet mentioned that in mid-1935 I made a connection with an agent, literary agent, to represent me, who was certainly one of the best literary agents in New York. He was Maxim Lieber who represented, among other authors, Gorky (until his death), Erskine Caldwell, John Cheever--do I need to spell some of these names?--Anna Seghers, and a host of fine writers. Unlike many another agent, Lieber ran a one-man operation: he had no readers but read everything himself, and was willing to sit and make comments about a piece of writing, and try and work with an author to improve it. As time passed, our relationship became one of friendship that has endured until today (although he gave up the agency business in 1952 for reasons that I will go into when I come to that time).

A point I want to raise is to what extent was I, as a writer, by this time a member of the Communist party, subject to the discipline of the Communist party in relationship to my writing. It is a common assumption everywhere that writers who were members of the Communist party were

subject to discipline in reference to their writing. Now, I'm going to exclude from my comments at this time the specific "Maltz controversy" that occurred in 1946 and which was dealing with what I call "ideology," and I will discuss it when I come up to that year.

GARDNER: Well, it's much later. I don't think it really has to do with discipline on a creative writer so much as discipline within the media.

MALTZ: It was a question of ideology, and I will come to it and discuss that fully. But in terms of my selection of material to write, let's say, as a play, a story, or a novel, there was absolutely no discipline ever exerted, or ever attempted, in reference to myself and, so far as I know, in reference to any other member of the Communist party who was a writer. Now, the reason why I think a confusion exists, and a wrong assumption, is that in the Soviet Union discipline is very definitely exerted upon writers. You have a closed situation in the Soviet Union where, number one, a writer in order to publish must be a member of the Writers Union; secondly, in order for anything to be published, it must pass a government censor. Now, if then a writer submits a book to a publisher or to a magazine and the censors say that it cannot be published the way it is, then he must either change his work, as frequently he does, or he must withdraw it and put it into a desk drawer. These

are the only two alternatives he has. So he is very definitely subject to censorship. Not only that but as we know in recent years, if he persists in any way and tries to publish it himself by the self-publishing method of circulating typewritten copies, then he can be expelled from the Writers Union altogether and be completely blacklisted so far as publication is concerned.

But nothing like that existed in the United States. The Communist party here had no such control over writers and never tried to exert such control because it would have been futile. I have no question but that in a socialist America it probably would have, at least the Communist party would have because it followed in the footsteps of the Soviet Communist party.

GARDNER: There is no instance in which a writer might have been asked to leave the party, say, because of something written? Let's continue to deal with this pre-1940 period.

MALTZ: Yes, yes, I want to go into that. Now, I am sure that there may have been instances in which a writer who was a member of the Communist party-- I don't know of these instances, but I'm sure a writer who was a member of the Communist party, let's say, submitted a creative piece of work to the New Masses for publication. Let's say it was a story and let's say it expressed ideas that the editors of the New Masses felt were antiblack, anti-Negro. I'm sure

they would have called in the author and talked with him about it. Now, if the author persisted in that position they would have said, "Well, we won't publish it." But if in addition the author was a member of the Communist party, I'm sure they would have reported the fact to the party, and then it would have been a matter of discussion in his group in the party. I'm sure that if he had persisted in saying, "This is right and I'm going to publish it elsewhere," and did publish it elsewhere, and it was an antiblack short story, that he would have been expelled from the Communist party. That's how that would have happened.

GARDNER: And you know of no instances of this?

MALTZ: I don't remember any instance where that happened. I remember a different kind of instance.

A well-known communist intellectual, Joseph Freeman, published a book called American Testament, an autobiographical work; he was then only in his thirties, but he did it as an autobiographical work. I liked the book. But about a year or so after it was published, there was a very severe and savage criticism of it in a Soviet newspaper, and the criticism of it was translated and reproduced over here, I believe, or summed up over here. To my best knowledge he was not expelled from the party because of that, but he dropped out of the party. Because I later talked with Mike Gold about it--Mike Gold had been a friend of his--and I

asked him whether he had been dropped from the party, and he said in effect, "Certainly not. He was given the opportunity to discuss this review on a platform with me, and he just wouldn't come. His feelings were hurt, and he dropped out of the party."

Now, however, I did have experiences like the following. When I was researching my first novel in Detroit during the sit-down strikes, I witnessed something that I wanted to use in my novel. In a small plant (I was at the front gate) there were workers sitting down inside, and I saw a black striker expose another worker, another member of the plant who was a black and who had not been sitting down, because he said he knew that that black man had been going around to the homes of other black workers in the plant telling the wives that their husbands were screwing women in the plant (because there were women sitting down in the plant too), and that they were drinking; and they were trying to get their wives to come, to say to their husbands, "You got to get out of the plant." Now, he was doing this obviously for the company. He was a company agent. And I said, "That's great, I'm going to use this in some way in my novel." I happened to mention this incident to a Communist party organizer in Detroit whom I knew, and he said, "Oh, you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't have a black stool pigeon." And I said, "He is a stool pigeon. He was a stool pigeon."

And he said, "Yeah, but you shouldn't do that." And I went and did it. That was his opinion. But that's just the way it was. I went and did it. And there was never any request that anybody should discuss the idea for a piece of material with any Communist, or a Communist functionary; you just wrote the way anybody else wrote.

However, when I came out to Los Angeles and into the film industry, I discovered that in the Communist party here, the Hollywood Communist party, there was such respect for John Howard Lawson that a tendency had grown up for individual writers who, let's say, wanted to write a piece of fiction to bring a manuscript to Lawson and ask him if he would read it. Now, Lawson was very generous with his time (I think too generous for his own good and for the good of the people he was trying to help), and he would take on the reading of anything--which meant, I'm sure, that in many cases he read it much too hastily and without proper thought. But he encouraged this; he encouraged people to bring him their manuscripts. So as a result, by the time I arrived this had grown into not only something that you did because he might be helpful--and there were many who said, "My goodness, he helped me so much, I'm so grateful to him, he set me straight"--but it became a situation, it was a situation when I came out here, where one really ought to show a manuscript to Lawson or discuss an idea with Lawson. And that was

turning a helpful thing into something which was its opposite. That was very bad.

Now, I never submitted an idea with Lawson, I never discussed with him anything I wanted to do, but I know that others did--others who surprised me. And I have learned that a number of people who intended to write books didn't write them because they discussed them with Lawson and he said, "Oh, I don't think that's a useful kind of thing to write at this time," or, "I don't think that's a subject you ought to go into. Why don't you take a subject like this?" and they dropped their projects.

GARDNER: Could you give any examples without getting sticky?

MALTZ: Without what?

GARDNER: Getting sticky.

MALTZ: Yes. I know that Guy Endore, who was a fine writer in his own right and an extremely independent man, dropped a book project that he had. I didn't know it at the time--I learned of this only recently from a mutual friend--and it astonished me that he would do that. I don't think of any other names at the moment. I do want to go back, however, to two other subjects, two other examples of so-called censorship.

Budd Schulberg published What Makes Sammy Run when I was still living in New York. I believe it came out around the spring of 1941. That's my impression. I liked the book

and I wrote a review of it for a magazine for which I was one of the editors, and I praised it. I think I did. Yes. But I know I liked it and that I appeared somewhere in print praising it. But apparently out here Schulberg gave the manuscript to Lawson and, I think, a few others, and they didn't like the book. The issue was really that he was presenting a central character, who was Jewish, as an intense opportunist. Now, for reasons I will explain in a moment, I ran into something like that myself in a piece of writing earlier. But all that was occurring there was that Schulberg voluntarily, because he didn't have to, gave his manuscript to some others to read, and they said they didn't like it, and they thought it was anti-Semitic, let's say. Well, Schulberg went ahead and published it. That, to me, is not an example of censorship. But Schulberg later, in appearing before the Un-American Activities Committee, used that as a reason why he had left the Communist party--because of the attempted censorship. And that's phony in my opinion. Edward Dmytryk did a similar thing on a film project (and I don't want to spend the time to go into it), but it was a similar question of discussion where he went ahead and made the film he wanted anyway, but people were discussing it.

Now, to me, let's say if Schulberg had chosen to revise his book, or even not to publish it, that would have been a case of self-discipline. Let me give two examples

of this. I have one unpublished novel--the last novel I wrote. It is the only novel I've ever written--the only story I've ever written--that I've submitted that has not been published. It is a dramatization of the Soviet use of psychiatric coercion to curb dissidents and to intimidate them. Without going into the reasons why it wasn't published, it occurred to me at a certain point some years after it had been just lying in a file that I might submit it to TV, and so I took it out and read it again. Now, I was very concerned in writing the book to strike a balance. This misuse of psychiatry is horrible, but it doesn't mean that all of Soviet society is a psychiatric hospital. The Soviet leadership over the years has done things that have been of benefit for the Russian people. The Russians live a hell of a lot better now than they did under the czars. And, to me, not to strike a balance would have been false. But when I looked over my manuscript again, I realized that in TV that balance would not have been struck; they would have just concentrated upon one thing, which was the misuse of psychiatry, and what would have come out would have been a complete distortion of my novel. And so I never submitted it. Now, this is between my conscience and me. I'm not a member of any party, therefore there's no party censorship on the part of anybody. But back around in the year 1935. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 15, 1978

GARDNER: Back in 1935. . . .

MALTZ: Yes, back in 1935 I had an experience of what I would call "self-discipline." I was not yet a member of the Communist party, but I might have been because I joined just a few months later, as I recall. I had written a story called "The Bluegrass Jew." My agent had submitted it and it had been bought by the American Mercury. But after the magazine bought it, the editor called up my agent and said, "Don't you think it is a touch anti-Semitic?" My agent told me that and I immediately said, "Well, I've got to investigate this by letting others read it." Now, the story was based upon my meeting a man at college who was in graduate school, who came from the bluegrass country of West Virginia and who, on the one hand, had adopted all of the most, to me, degraded and vicious antiblack attitudes of his worst white neighbors and, on the other hand, spoke proudly of his black mammy who used to slap him across the face if he came in drunk. At the same time that he boasted that his family had lived in West Virginia for 100 years and he had forebears who had fought in the Civil War on the Confederate side, he told me in a whisper that his father was not able to join the country club, and he couldn't work in the local bank, because he was

a Jew. And he went on to say that he was a white Jew, however, and he was not one of those goddamn Eastside New York Jews.

I did this story to present this stupid guy who spouted prejudice from every orifice constantly and at the same time felt that he was being discriminated against.

I remember that at a rehearsal of a play that was going on I gave it to about, oh, half a dozen or more of the Executive Board, or whoever was around in the theater--I don't remember who the individuals were. And all of them agreed, with no exceptions, that it seemed to them to be anti-Semitic. Now, I'm convinced now that it wasn't anti-Semitic, but we were then in a situation, of course, when fascism had taken power in Germany, and anti-Semitic movements were rising on all sides in the United States, and therefore it was an extremely touchy subject. And so I voluntarily withdrew the story from the magazine, and it has never been published. I just found it the other day in my file and reread it, and I think it is a good story. I'm sorry.

GARDNER: Do you think it is anti-Semitic?

MALTZ: No, I don't think it is anti-Semitic; it's a true portrait. Everybody knows that there are prejudiced people, no matter who they are--as any intelligent person knows--and I think I should have published it then and argued the question with those who wanted to argue it. But that is an example of self-censorship. And that goes on all the time

because that's between a writer's conscience and what he does. I'm sure that if a given writer today were to give a manuscript to a friend of his who was a woman, and the woman said, "I like your novel, but don't you think this portrait is pretty male chauvinist in this instance?" If the writer were sensitive to the question, he'd say, "Gee, I think you're right. I'll make a change." Because I don't want to be a male chauvinist, and I think it's horrid, I don't agree with it, and so on. Now, have I covered this subject? Do you have any questions on it?

GARDNER: No. No. I think those that I've asked, I think, covered what my questions were.

MALTZ: Good. At this time in my life, perhaps early '36, I began something that I've continued at different times throughout my life, and that is readings in American history, which I had not done in college where I had concentrated so completely on study of philosophy. I began with the period of the American Revolution and with a very notable book which I find just as good today as when I read it, oh, forty years ago, and that's Jefferson and Hamilton by Claude Bowers. You know the book? Yes, marvelous book, I think. And I went on to read other works about the period, and I got the idea for a novel that would be based on the movement organized by Jefferson against the Alien and Sedition Acts and against the presidency of John Adams. I made notes for

the novel, which was going to have the title of The Tinker and be about a man who traveled from town to town; but like many another project, it fell by the wayside. I also did some intensive reading in the Know-Nothing movement and the American party, and the persecution of Catholics in the United States that occurred during the 1840s, 1850s, and 1870s, and I had a title for that called The Beautiful Maria, based upon an actual person: a low-IQ woman who had been in a nunnery for some years and then had come out, and who was exhibited around the country as an example of how women were mistreated, I guess, within the Catholic establishment. She was a beautiful woman and made a useful appearance for demagogues who were arousing anti-Catholic hatred. I never wrote that novel either, but my knowledge of that came in very usefully when Adrian Scott was preparing the film Crossfire, and when I come up to that I'll discuss it.

I'd like now to go to certain political events that occurred in 1934 and 1936, 1937, in the Soviet Union and that are summed up by the general term, the "Moscow trials." Because, like Spain, like the civil war in Spain, the Moscow trials had tremendous reverberations in the United States and in the world and were something that commanded all of my attention and that shook me up. I'm reminded of something interesting. Certainly a monumental event in 1870 in France was the siege of Paris by the German army and, at the same

time, the commune of the Communists who defended Paris and led the people for a short period. Victor Hugo was in Paris at that time, having been in exile for many years before, and was close to all of the events. But Emile Zola--who was also in Paris at that time and who later was to be so involved in the Dreyfus case--had no interest whatsoever in what was going on and was annoyed because the cannon fire was disturbing him at his writing. So people react in very different ways to the events of history, and I reacted with tremendous intensity and concern to the Moscow trials.

I mention them here because I was among the many millions who accepted the Moscow version of those trials, and I now believe that version to have been completely false. And so the question of our blindness seems to me to require analysis. Briefly, in December 1934 one of the top Soviet leaders, [Sergei Mironovich] Kirov, was shot in the back and killed. There is reason now to believe that the assassination may have been ordered by Stalin. (In terms of material evidence on this, I recommend what I consider to be a magnificent work of history, Let History Judge by Roy Medvedev. This is the only history of the Stalinist period written by a Russian who remains in Russia.) In January 1935 a group of leading Communists, men who at times had opposed Stalin's policies, were put on trial for responsibility in the assassination; among them were Zinoviev and Kamenev. They denied

their guilt and were given sentences of five and ten years. During 1935 and the first half of 1936 many Soviet citizens were arrested and shot or sent to labor camps. In August '36, Zinoviev and Kamenev and others were put on trial again, with the reporters of the world allowed to be in attendance. This time they confessed that they had caused the murder of Kirov and had planned to kill Stalin, Molotov, and other leaders, and that they wanted to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union, that they had connections with foreign governments. Specific useful reference here is page 169 of Let History Judge.

Now, in the United States there was a tremendous amount of attention that was given to this. I and others read about it and talked about it incessantly. Not without agitation, not without pause, I and others accepted the Moscow version and these were the reasons. I said to myself that if I was on trial and knew I was going to be shot (and these men had to know they were going to be shot after what they confessed), I would not confess falsely. All I would have left would be my honor, and I would proclaim my innocence and say, "All right, shoot me if you wish, but I am innocent." And so I asked, why didn't the defendants do this? Secondly, there had been turncoats in many a revolution, including our own. Benedict Arnold was one of the leading generals in the United States. He was in charge of the fort at West Point.

If he could turn against the United States in the way he did, accept money from the British, prepare to turn over a fort to the British, why couldn't this happen with some of the Soviet leaders? Third, the alternative to believing the confessions was to believe that these men were framed by Stalin and the other government leaders. And that seemed to me to be impossible. Because, I said, why should old comrades frame one another? I wouldn't frame any member of the Communist party that I knew, and I wouldn't believe that they would frame me. We weren't in this for any narrow or selfish purpose. That was naive on my part because I had no comprehension, in my young idealism, of the lust for power that can arise among people. And finally, as I mentioned earlier in this narrative . . .

GARDNER: Will you respond to those?

MALTZ: Will I comment upon them?

GARDNER: What I'm curious about . . .

MALTZ: Please interrupt me.

GARDNER: I wanted to wait until you were done with the series, with that series.

MALTZ: I have, finally; I have something to say finally.

GARDNER: Well, since you've put the page down there, let me ask--it's a little easier than coming back--what now is your reasoning on the confessions?

MALTZ: Let me come back. I will come back.

GARDNER: I just wanted to make sure.

MALTZ: Finally, as I mentioned earlier in this narrative, I, like millions of other Communists, had been conditioned by the overwhelming amount of lying and anti-Soviet propaganda to disregard all negative comments about the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, from where I sit now, these reasons, however weighty, don't adequately explain our acceptance of those trials whole hog. Because during these trials, and afterwards, there were very searching analyses of them in the press and especially in magazines, especially for me in magazines like the New Republic and the Nation, which could not be dismissed as just wholesale anti-Soviet.

For instance, I recall items like this: that one of the men on trial had been placed as meeting an agent of a foreign government in a hotel in one of the Scandinavian countries some years after the hotel had been torn down. Now, when you come upon an error like this, you should pause and say, "Hey, why is there an error like this?" And there were not a few other blatant holes like this in the prosecution evidence. And I read them and others did also, and why did we nevertheless accept the verdict? Because our emotional commitment to the cause of socialism, which we identified with the policies of the Soviet Union, blurred our intellectual perception. This is an explanation, it's not an excuse. If I had known in 1937 what I came to know

in '57, I would have dropped out of the Communist party. Nevertheless I would have supported, let's say, the Loyalists in the Spanish civil war, as the Communist party did, and I would have opposed the cold war and the House Committee on Un-American Activities later, but I would not have remained in the party.

Now, recently I have had some extended conversations with two historians in their mid-thirties, and they can't believe that I and others knew nothing about the internal oppression in the thirties in the Soviet Union--the arrests, imprisonments, tortures, executions. I won't maintain that there was no blindness involved here also, but I insist that there was no knowledge, and I believe I can prove it by the following facts.

In 1956 at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist party in the Soviet Union, Khrushchev revealed what had gone on. And when these savage facts were printed in the Daily Worker, thousands left the American Communist party, and those who remained entered into a frenzied debate about the causes and meaning of these horrors. In the next several years thousands more left the party. Within a few years the party was left with about one-quarter of the membership it had had in '56. The same intellectual and moral revulsion affected a larger group who were not party members in 1956, but sympathizers. Now, if those Communist party members and

sympathizers had known in the years before '56 what was going on, why would they have been surprised and revolted by the Khrushchev revelations? They would have had their rationalizations ready and would have gone about their business unperturbed, just the way members of the Communist party do today.

I want to add one other thing. When confronted by the confessions and saying, "Well, I wouldn't confess," I did not then know of the ingenious, or ingeniously fiendish, methods that the Soviets invented of breaking down human beings. I now believe that there is absolutely no human being--well, no, I won't say. . . . I was going to say there is no human being they couldn't break down because I know that there were instances of people they couldn't break down. They merely shot them then. But there was a film called The Confession made a few years ago, and since most who happen to read this particular oral history will not have seen the film, I might mention that the Soviet practice is very simple. They wear people down by. . . . [tape recorder turned off] I said that the Soviet method is simple, and that's an error. Let's cut that one. The Soviets had different methods of breaking people down. And the book Confession by London, who was one of the Czechs involved in the [Rudolf] Slansky trial in 1952, gives a portrait of it. In addition there is The Gulag [Archipelago] by Solzhenitsyn.

However, I was told one story in 1959 in Poland, which is a symbolic example of what the Soviets do--not a literal example. It is perhaps one of the things that happened, but it can stand symbolically for what they achieved with people. The man who told this to me was the editor of a publishing house who had been a colonel in a Polish division attached to the Russian army during World War II. And he spoke very frankly to me when I became friendly with him and said, "How did it happen that people confessed?" I raised the very question that I've put here: that I myself would not confess--why did they? He said, "I'll tell you a story." He said, "First of all, you must understand that many did not confess and were shot. I know from someone who was there that one example of this was . . . " and he mentioned someone who had been in the foreign department--what do you call the foreign department? No, no, in the Soviet Union. . . . We don't say foreign department . . .

GARDNER: State Department.

MALTZ: State Department. One that had been that equivalent. And [this person] was brought down before a military court and was charged with crimes, and he said, "I am innocent and you are fascist murderers, and some day the party will catch up with you," and he was shot. And he said there were many like that. However, he said there were others like this; and he told of a leading member of the Communist party,

a member of the Central Committee, who was arrested and put into a cell with a good many others whom he recognized. And they said, "Oh, hello, So-and-so," and he said, "Don't talk to me. You are Trotskyite saboteurs and I am an honest Communist." And they said, "Oh, you don't want to talk to us? Okay." A little while later he was taken down to a room, a cellar room where there was a young, strong peasant in an army uniform, or maybe it was a secret-police uniform, and the man said to him, "What's your name?" And he said, my name is So-and-so. The policeman looked at him and after a moment said, "I'll ask you again: What is your name?" This leading Communist said, "But I just told you, sir, everybody knows me, I've been a member of the party for so many and so many years. I've been this. My name is So-and-so." A pause. The man said, "For the third time--and last time--I'll ask you: What is your name?" The man said, "I don't understand what's going on here. I've told you my name. My name is So-and-so. There's nothing else I can do." The young secret-police man gets up and knocks this man down, knocks his glasses off. He is bleeding from the nose and the policeman says, "Get up." The guy feels around, gets his glasses, puts them on, gets up, and the guy says, "What's your name?" He's unable to talk. He says, "What can I tell you other than what I told you before?" The policeman gets up and knocks him down again. And when this has been repeated

for a number of times, the policeman says, "I'll tell you what your name is," as the man is lying on the ground, "Your name is shit! Now get up." And the guy gets up and the policeman says, "Now, what's your name?" And he says, "Well . . . my name is . . . my name is shit." And he is then taken upstairs and put back in the cell. He comes into the cell and he says, "Comrades, what's going on in this place?" And they said, "Aha, now you are ready to talk to us, huh!" How do you like that for a story?

GARDNER: Terrific. [tape recorder turned off]

MALTZ: Immediately after Christmas 1936, I believe, I went to Detroit to get material for my first novel, The Underground Stream. I no longer remember exactly the idea that was the genesis of the book, although I know that it came to me the previous summer while I was still in Westport. But I do know that when I went to Detroit there were several things I wanted to find out about. The first was the murder of an organizer of the Unemployed Councils in Detroit by the name of Marchuck; and the second was the nature of an organization called the Black Legion which was an offshoot of the Ku Klux Klan and was operating in the Detroit area. It happened that there were sit-down strikes in many of the General Motors plants, and I think [in] the plants, perhaps, at Chrysler at that time in Detroit, and in Flint, Michigan, and in other states. These strikes were the culmination of the effort of

the CIO to organize the automobile industry. The technique of workers sitting down inside the plants at which they worked was a new one in the United States that had occurred previously in France and had been taken over by the American workers. In Michigan, because of the governor, Murphy, who was a liberal and a man of principle, there was no use of state troops or the national guard to get the workers out of the plants by force. This removed from the power of the companies the most effective weapon that they might have had. They could, of course, hire as many company policemen as they wished, and they hired a great many. They bought a great many weapons and a lot of tear gas, but when they were faced by some hundreds, or in certain cases thousands, of workers sitting in a plant it was not so easy to get them out. In addition to workers in the plants, there were picket lines outside. The automobile union in general had a very well-running organization to supply the men and women inside the plants with food and water, and then when the company in winter turned off the heat, with blankets and warm clothing, and to provide food and coffee for the pickets outside.

I had introductions to several people in Detroit. One of them was the head of the Communist party of Detroit--a man called Weinstone, William Weinstone--and he put me in contact with certain others who were very active in the field so that I was able to do things like go to all of the large union

meetings and hear what was going on in the meetings. And I observed the picket lines and, in one or two cases, marched on them. (Observed the picket lines in action, I mean, and in one or two cases marched on them.) And I had a good deal of contact with a particular individual who was extremely stimulating. He was a local--I wouldn't say organizer; he was a Communist and I don't remember now whether. . . . I think he was organizing among the auto workers. He was a Scotchman with a slight accent who was a fancy baker. He was so skilled as a baker that at that time he could make about twenty-two dollars a night (twenty-two dollars for twenty-four hours' work was an extraordinary wage), and then he'd live on that for the rest of the week. So he worked one night a week and would give the rest of his time to organizing. But he was a man with a great deal of charisma and a lot of knowledge, and I learned a lot from him about local conditions.

I found out a good deal about the Black Legion (I won't go into it because I used the material in my book), and then at one point I was invited by Weinstone to accompany him (I guess there were a few others) up to Flint, Michigan, where there was a particularly important crisis in the sit-down strikes. In one General Motors plant there were, I think, about 1,000 or 2,000 men. The union knew that there was going to be an attempt by force to eject the men, and I was there on the night on which this was attempted. This was done by

firing tear gas into the plant through the windows. But the workers knocked out other windows and they were able to resist the effect of the tear gas.

I might say that I never knew how powerful a weapon tear gas was until that night because I was with a very large group of pickets just hanging around on the outskirts when the company police shot tear gas at us and in a fraction of a second my eyes were tearing so violently that I was absolutely blinded. I didn't know where I was. I ran with the group as we were running but I couldn't see anything. My eyes, of course, were burning in addition. And on that night I saw firsthand--I had not seen such things before--an excellent example of what the press can sometimes do, or what the press will do, when it is biased. There was a restaurant about twenty yards from the end of the building of this plant, and many of the pickets would go inside to drink a cup of coffee because the night was extremely cold. And I saw a company policeman walk in front of the restaurant and shoot a tear gas shell right through the plate-glass window. The next day the press reported that an unknown striker had thrown a tear gas bomb into the restaurant.

I wrote a piece about that night [tape recorder turned off] which was called "Bodies by Fisher" and was published in the New Masses, and another piece called "Marching Song," which was published in New Theatre magazine.

There was one particular episode which I will never forget. At a moment when the police were firing tear gas into the plant, there was a union truck with a loudspeaker in the center of the wide street that separated two of the company's plants, and Victor Reuther, the younger brother of the man who would later become president of the union, Walter Reuther, was in the truck. His voice, urging the strikers to hold fast, rose higher and higher and higher above the sound of the exploding shells, and above the yells, and above the police sirens, and kept on indomitably--on and on and on. It was a moment of drama that was quite overwhelming.

I remember that the next night when the workers of the sit-down had won that battle, I returned to Detroit in a car driven by a man who six months later died in Spain as a volunteer.

TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 20, 1978

GARDNER: We left off talking about the sit-down strikes, and you mentioned that you'd like to say a little more about that.

MALTZ: I have a few more points on that. One correction: I believe I was in error in saying that Governor Murphy of Michigan did not call out the national guard. On the contrary, I believe he did call it out for duty in Flint, but it was for a unique purpose: it was to prevent vigilante attacks against the strikers, and this was very different from its usual role. For instance, I have mentioned that in 1934 I visited Toledo, where there had been an intense strike. And the national guard was called out. In the course of something that happened, three of the workers were shot and killed.

Another point about the events in Detroit was the manner in which white and black workers put aside feelings of hatred toward each other and got together out of common necessity. For instance, I was introduced to a white picket captain who oversaw a whole section of line of pickets in front of a General Motors plant (I think the Cadillac plant, I'm not sure). He, I was told, had held the rope at a lynching a month before he came up to work in Detroit. But in the crucible of the strike, when the workers needed solidarity each

for his own sake, this man overcame his prejudices enough to cooperate with black workers without revealing anything of what his feelings might be. And I used this man in part as a basis for one of the important characters in my novel about men in prison, A Long Day in a Short Life; the name of the character was McPeak. I also drew on my experiences for, naturally, a great deal of the information and some of the characters in my novel The Underground Stream.

The head of the state police of Michigan was an unusual man who made a practice of reading Marxist pamphlets and books and apparently took a great deal of pleasure in arguing with Communists under arrest and showing his knowledge of Marxism. I used him as the basis for a character called Grebb in my novel. Also in part I used the notorious Bennett, who was the head of the Ford Motor Company's security personnel. I used the fancy baker I have referred to for aspects of my leading character, Princey, and various other individuals whom I met. And in addition, of course, I gathered general material in the course of visiting one of the auto plants that was not struck. I observed, among other things, a man at work on a heavy drop forge and I used that later in my novel The Cross and the Arrow. It's relevant, I think, to mention at this point that the Communist party played an enormous role in organizing the CIO.

GARDNER: Now, were you aware when you went to Detroit of

what was going on between the AFL and the sort of fledgling CIO at that point?

MALTZ: Oh, yes, I was very aware because, first of all, that was general knowledge and had been since at least 1934. In '34 when I was out in the Pittsburgh area, for instance, I met with a group who called themselves--who were rank-and-file steel workers, led by some Communists, who wanted to create an industrial union in steel and were being fought very bitterly by the AF of L union in steel, which represented only a small portion of the skilled workers and was not interested in the others. This question of industrial unions versus craft unions was a major one in the trade union field in those years. And of course the reason why the CIO unions, under the leadership of John L. Lewis, broke away from the AF of L is because the old-line AF of L leadership refused to countenance the organization of unions which would take in all of the workers in a plant. And unless that were done there could never be any raising of the level of working conditions and pay for the great mass of working people.

GARDNER: And then when you went to some place like Pittsburgh and then Detroit, you did meet with the--or hobnob is not exactly the word--but did you meet with the leaders of the various unions?

MALTZ: No, I didn't meet with the leaders of unions; for instance, in Pittsburgh I certainly didn't meet with the

leaders of the AF of L union.

GARDNER: I meant the CIO.

MALTZ: I met with some of the rank and file of the CIO, and in Detroit and Flint it happened I met Walter Reuther (just being introduced to him). I met two of the leading organizers in Flint--Wyndham Mortimer and Robert Travis--but I didn't work with them. They were very busy individuals and therefore it was just a passing meeting. But I was aware of what they were doing, and I was in touch with rank-and-file members of the auto workers union so that I learned what was going on. I also was able to attend the meetings, the public meetings of the auto workers union.

GARDNER: Were you doing any writing on these for the Worker, for example?

MALTZ: No, not while I was there. Well, as a result of what I observed in Flint, I wrote two articles which I have mentioned: one for the New Masses and one later for a theater magazine. But I wasn't there to report it.

GARDNER: You weren't there as a reporter?

MALTZ: No, I went purely to try and gather material if I could for the novel that I had envisioned the summer before.

However, just coming back, and to make mention, the role of rank-and-file workers who were Communists, and the role of leaders like Mortimer and Travis, whom I have mentioned, was such that by 1939 members of the Communist party emerged in

top leadership, or second-level leadership, of many unions-- among them auto, steel, rubber workers, mine, mill and smelter, electrical, West Coast longshore, New York transport workers, New York fur and painters union, the Florida shipbuilding, aircraft and agricultural unions, the newspaper guild, and so on.

Now, this leadership was not achieved, as is often said in ignorance, or slanderously, by cunning or by sitting longer hours at meetings than others; it was the result of advocating policies and tactics that were to the advantage of the workers. It was the result of intelligence, sincerity, hard work, personal sacrifice for the union and, on many occasions, physical courage in the face of attacks by company goons or vigilantes or police. The Communist party made a great contribution to the unionization of American workers in the thirties, and this unionization ended corporate despotism for millions of workers who had been suffering miserable wages and working conditions. It also brought some democracy into communities where none had been before. For instance, some years before, a few years before, the mayor of Duquesne, a western Pennsylvania steel town, said, "Even Jesus Christ couldn't speak for unions in this town." And that was the measure of the general democracy that would have been permitted there.

I returned to New York about the end of January and.

began to work out the form and direction of the novel. And I returned, of course, to those time-consuming activities which I was compelled by my inner needs at that time to continue--work in the Theatre Union, work in the League of American Writers, on which I functioned on the executive board, and work in the Authors League, of which I was a member of the council. I think I have mentioned already that the Authors League was not a political organization, but it was in effect the trade union, or guild, of all professional writers. I continued to meet with the very special branch of the Communist party of which I was a member, but which involved no outside work beyond meetings. However, it did involve some reading and study, and in this respect it was different from other branches of the Communist party where members were asked to take on different sorts of assignments.

My life, of course, at this time, and all others, always included reading and occasional movies and all interesting theater, of which there was a good deal at that time in New York. And in addition, it was part of the routine of life to attend certain political meetings which went on in the general community--let's say, a rally about Spain or on any other subject of concern. I remember being present at one rather small public meeting at which there were three Spanish priests who had come over to try and lecture to the American public and tell them that not all of the Spanish clergy was

aligned with fascists. And I remember the severe attacks on them in the newspapers beforehand by the Catholic establishment and verbal attacks on them in that meeting.

The last production of the Theatre Union, Marching Song, written by John Howard Lawson, opened in February 1937. Due to an illness I had in the fall of '36 and my subsequent trip to Detroit, I had very little part in its production. Since the Theatre Union had lost the Civic Repertory Theatre, a committee of the Executive Board searched for a theater in the Broadway area that was not too costly. One was found on Forty-second Street, the Nora Bayes Theatre. It was cheaper than others because it had been built on top of another theater and could only be reached by elevators. Although our price scale was raised, our tickets continued to be much lower than that of the regular Broadway theaters, and we hoped to make a new start there.

GARDNER: What street did you say it was on?

MALTZ: On Forty-second Street. I believe it was Forty-second Street, I wouldn't take an oath in court. [laughter] However, Marching Song opened to bad reviews, except in the Left press, and it had only a run of seven weeks. By the time it closed, the Theatre Union was also ready to shut up shop--not willingly, but because of bankruptcy.

GARDNER: How had the character of the Theatre Union changed, or had it, during that period? Was it more or less the same people?

MALTZ: It had not changed. Some new people had come in. One or two people had ceased to be active. It basically had not changed and perhaps would have been better if it had changed. There was a certain lack of elasticity, I would say, and I'm going to talk about that in a moment. I think that the theater at all times lacked, let's say, some very gifted individual who might have brought to it a style and élan which we associate with some of the great theaters of the past. But we didn't have it.

Now, in four years we had put on seven plays, and each year our indebtedness to the printer who placed our newspaper advertisements and to certain other services increased until it amounted to about \$17,000 by the end of 1936. And that was a considerable sum of money at that time. Perhaps half of it was in personal loans to friends of the theater who we knew would be gracious about accepting their loss. But the balance had to be met in part at least, and we could no longer do so, especially since the setup at the Nora Bayes Theatre was more difficult financially than the Civic Repertory had been.

During the four years of its existence and the year of initial planning and propaganda, an enormous amount of energy and effort was expended by a considerable number of people. One of the biggest rewards to them--that is to say, to all of us--was an emotional intangible: the sense of

fraternal warmth, togetherness, and comradeship that comes when people join together to work for a common goal that they believe to be a worthy one. The goal can be anything as long as they think it's worthy. Individuals, of course, have goals. A husband and a wife have goals. And the striving to achieve these goals can be an intense and rewarding experience. But an additional and very powerful, very wholesome, emotional experience comes from an endeavor linked with others outside of one's family. At least this was how I felt during all of the total five years of endeavor, and I can remember it now with a good deal of pleasure. I was to experience this again a year later as a member of the Hollywood Ten--ten years later as a member of the Hollywood Ten. When I look back on what the Theatre Union achieved and didn't achieve, I feel that its contemporary achievements were noteworthy. It established a left-wing theater, which until that time had been completely amateur, on a professional basis in its writing, acting, direction, scenic design, and so on. Everyone of any talent connected with the theater went on to further professional work in theater or film or both. The Theatre Union ended racial discrimination in seating in the New York theater years before it ended in other areas of life, even in New York City. For instance, in restaurants, I can remember at one time, by example, right in the thirties wondering whether Richard Wright and

I would find a restaurant that would accept him for lunch when we wanted to find a place to eat.

GARDNER: I wasn't aware of that.

MALTZ: Oh, yes. Nowadays things are very different in those areas, but it was impossible in the thirties for a black man to walk into any of the hotels in mid-Manhattan and get a room. Just couldn't. And as late as, let's say, the forties, when black ballplayers first came into baseball, into so-called professional baseball (they had been in the black leagues), they were not allowed in the same hotels as the white players.

GARDNER: Even in New York?

MALTZ: I don't know whether that was so in New York, but it was certainly true in cities outside of New York and in restaurants in New York throughout the thirties that black people did not enter. There was one hotel in Harlem, the name of which I forget . . .

GARDNER: The Teresa?

MALTZ: Yes, that's right, the Teresa . . . which was the hotel that blacks went to when they came to New York. And it was part of Fidel Castro's style that he went there when he visited the United States shortly after he came to power in Cuba.

The total audience attendance for the Theatre Union's seven plays amounted to over a half a million people, which

is considerable for a theater that seated, let's say, about 1,200. And it included many individuals who had never before seen a play. Because, although they lived in New York City and there was theater in New York City, it was foreign to their way of life to go to a Theatre Guild play. It was just not part of what they did, and the Theatre Union changed that for them. The theater launched the careers of a number of new actors who went on to have quite brilliant careers-- John Garfield, Canada Lee and Lee Cobb. It also developed a system of audience organization with its theater parties that has been used ever since by other theaters.

GARDNER: I didn't realize that was the. . . ?

MALTZ: Yes, that was the creation. There had been theater parties, you see, before the Theatre Union came along, but the manner in which we handled them, the policy we developed, was one in which we allowed organizations to make a profit on the tickets. It was beneficial for us to have them take tickets at a cheaper price, and since the organizations could sell to their members at list price, they made a profit for their organization and worked hard to push the tickets. And as a result, we enormously expanded the method of having theater parties, and it proved to be a very solid manner for a way of organizing audiences. The existence of the Theatre Union in New York stimulated and supported left-wing amateur theater throughout the United States, and it contributed to

the growth of other professional theater groups like the Actors Repertory Theatre, which was headed by Will Geer.

However, the Theatre Union did not invent any new forms of theatrical expression which had any lasting effect upon the American theater, nor did it develop, let's say, an acting technique as the Group Theatre did under the tutelage of Lee Strasberg and Harold Clurman, and which was then carried on in the Actors Studio. Regrettably also the plays that the Theatre Union produced did not become part of what I would call the lasting dramatic literature of our time, although I think that at least Stevedore deserved to be, and probably also Sailors of Cattaro. I think that it was for political reasons that Stevedore never went into any anthologies, because reading it over just a few years ago, I found it to be a stunningly dramatic and, I think, fine play, which should be revived--which could be revived now, I think, with great success.

In fact, I would say about the Theatre Union plays that, although they were different in content and locale, they tended to have a similarity of pattern that was summed up by Nathaniel Buchwald, a perceptive critic who wrote for a Communist Yiddish newspaper [Morning] Freiheit. He said, just in conversation at one point, that the plays could be characterized by a pattern that said: first act, we suffer; second act, we organize; and third act, we strike. And there was an element of real truth about this. I believe

that if the Theatre Union had lasted longer, it would have broken out of this pattern, but it was a fair and astute remark.

Now, in 1963 Rutgers University Press published a book called Drama Was a Weapon by a simpleminded professor of English at Adelphi College whose name is Morgan Himelstein. He stated the thesis of his book on the first page: "Armed with the slogan 'Drama is a weapon' the Communist party attempted to infiltrate and control the American stage during the Great Depression of the 1930s." This is the thesis of his whole book, and he comes to the satisfied conclusion that the Communist party failed in this attempt. Now, with this thesis he reduced a large social phenomenon to a Communist party plot: that is, the world economic depression of the thirties, the existence of the Soviet Union, the existence of fascism in Italy and the rise of a more malignant fascism in Germany, the New Deal under Roosevelt, the struggle of workers to get their own unions--all these were phenomena of the time. It was impossible for people not to be affected by them, and it was impossible for these events not to be reflected in the theater of the period.

For instance, the Theatre Guild, which had been for some years the outstanding theater organization in New York and in the United States, and which was noted for its truly splendid productions of good American and European and

classical plays, proceeded in the course of the thirties to put on They Shall Not Die, by John Wexley, which was not only a dramatic play about the case of the Scottsboro boys, who were then imprisoned and awaiting the final judgment in their case, but it was also, to an extent, an agitational-propaganda play. They put on Idiot's Delight by Robert Sherwood, which dealt with the question of war. They put on Parade by Paul Peters and George Sklar, the authors of Stevedore, which was a satiric musical review, and quite a few other plays that were decidedly different from their previous repertoire because they involved issues of social content rather than merely interpersonal relations. I don't mean by that that the Theatre Guild completely changed its bill of fare--because it didn't--but it did proceed to add this new dimension of social plays, plays of social content, to its repertoire.

Now, the Group Theatre, which had come into existence in 1931, provided a varying bill of plays over the next ten years that varied from something as left-wing as Odets' play Waiting for Lefty to such a, let's say, middle-class play as Men in White by Sidney Kingsley. And this is a theater that can be best described as a liberal theater.

During these years there was the growth of other theaters as well: the Actors Repertory, of which Will Geer was the leader; the Theatre of Action, which was very left wing;

the Mercury Theatre, under Orson Welles, which on the one hand produced Shakespeare and, on the other hand, The Cradle Will Rock by Marc Blitzstein. And there was the WPA Theatre, some of whose plays had as much social content as the plays of the Theatre Union. And finally in this period, a magazine called New Theatre came into existence and in a few months achieved a circulation that made it a competitor of other theater magazines of the day.

Now, Professor Himelstein, however, instead of viewing all of this theatrical ferment and activity as a natural result of the events of the period, finds it evidence of his simpleminded thesis that the Communist party tried to take over the American theater, and that the production of a play of social content by the Theatre Guild was a manifestation of this plot, and the Group Theatre was a manifestation of this plot, and so on. Now, this foolishness is an example, not only of his personal shallowness, but of the influence of McCarthyism on the writing of history. There are two books about that period that have come to my attention that have much more merit (although, in my opinion, both are flawed): one of them is The Political Stage by Professor Malcolm Goldstein, and the other is Stage Left by Jay Williams. I think I ought to mention that some of the records of the Theatre Union are to be found today in the library of the Lincoln Center in New York [New York Public Library at

Lincoln Center]. I understand that they are not in good condition. And some data is among my materials in the University of Wisconsin's Center for Film and Theatre Research.

GARDNER: Do you think Theatre Union could have made a go of it had it varied its fare, or would that have been philosophically impossible? In other words, had there been a classic or something that was more likely to make some money tossed in?

MALTZ: You mean had it, in addition to doing plays of social content, let's say, also put on Shakespeare? Well, I think that it might well have. I'm not sure. No, I think it might well have, and I think perhaps it would have been a much profounder approach to such a theater to have done that. I know that I, for instance, was very well aware during the years of the Theatre Union of the plays of Galsworthy, many of which I thought were simply remarkable, and I do still today. I would have loved to have us present a play like Justice or The Silver Box or The Skin Game, which were plays, let's say, of social content. But they would not have had the type of a more Marxist approach which we wanted to have in the Theatre Union--a broad approach but nevertheless touched by Marxism that was satisfactory to the Socialist members of our group as well as the Communists. I think that if we had done plays like that, we might have

come off better financially and so have had a longer life. But it's also true that the Group Theatre did more plays like that and, for instance, did a play by Maxwell Anderson, who was a very successful American playwright, a very successful playwright in the commercial theater. Nevertheless, that particular play was a flop. Running a theater is a gamble. But, let's say, if I were starting all over again, I would want to do what you just suggested.

GARDNER: Was it a conscious choice not to on the part of the people who ran it, or did it just develop that way?

MALTZ: It just developed that way. We wanted to start a theater that would be a theater of social meaning. I think, well, let's just turn off for a second and I will. . . . [tape recorder turned off]

The Theatre Union's opening statement to the public when it announced its first play said: "We produce plays that deal boldly with the deep-going social complex--the economic, emotional, and cultural problems that confront the majority of the people. Our plays speak directly to this majority whose lives usually are caricatured or ignored on the stage. We do not expect that these plays will fall into accepted social patterns. This is a new kind of professional theater based on the interests and hopes of the great mass of working people." Now, this is what guided us and we tried to adhere to it. But I think, to name these plays of Galsworthy that

I have, it would have been a more interesting theater if we had continued in that way. But we didn't. [laughter]

Now, my discussion of the Himelstein book leads me to the brief, very brief, discussion of the manner in which history is written. I would say in the last fifteen years I have read some books which deal with events of which I was a part, and I have been appalled by the enormous amount of errors, both of fact and of interpretation and understanding, that appear in them. For instance, an article appeared in a magazine on theater about the production of Brecht's Mother, written by Lee Baxandall. Now, Baxandall sent questionnaires to all of the living members of the Theatre Union he could not see in person and interviewed the others. He certainly made an effort to be thorough and accurate in his research, and yet, from my point of view, there are various errors in the article that came not from him but from other members of the Theatre Union whose memory I regarded as being fallacious. But I certainly would never take the position that only my memory is infallible, and therefore I recognize that I too, in the writing of history, would make errors.

However, one of the reasons why I was very eager to do this oral history was that I felt that whatever errors I would make (and I hoped I would make few), I knew that I could set the record straighter on certain events in which I had participated than many of those who were writing

about it. And so, as I have gone along, I have tried to check my memory by all available books in order to at least avoid errors of fact. Interestingly enough, I would still go back to a work like Jefferson and Hamilton by Bowers and, I'm sure, be persuaded by it and feel that it was soundly written. Nevertheless I now do come to the conclusion that we are always reading, at any given moment, flawed history, and that there is no way around the subject.

In a conversation just today with someone, I remembered that Charles and Mary Beard, who certainly were very well-respected historians, in a large book that was a history of America and American democracy (I don't remember the exact title) passed over the Civil War without making any mention of the black troops in the northern army. And yet one of the decisive military factors in the last year of the war was the presence of this 200,000 body of black troops in the army and of the half a million other blacks who were in transport behind the lines, digging trenches, carrying ammunition, so forth. So this is an example of the way in which history can be written.

I'd like now to give a little attention to the phrase "proletarian literature," which I was supposed to be writing, among others, and to ask what it is. In 1935. . . .
[sound interference--tape recorder turned off]

TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 20, 1978

GARDNER: You were about to begin talking about proletarian literature.

MALTZ: Yes. In 1935, an anthology, Proletarian Literature in the United States was published by International Publishers, which was the Communist party publishing house. And it was published not many months after the first League of American Writers congress, and its contributors had for the most part been present at the congress. Now, some of the contributors, whose names are well known forty-three years later as I dictate this, are Erskine Caldwell, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Michael Gold, Langston Hughes, Kenneth Patchen, Muriel Rukeyser, Richard Wright, Clifford Odets, John Wexley, Malcolm Cowley. The fact that these well-known writers--plus others of merit whose names are not so well known--would all have agreed to have material of theirs published in a volume called Proletarian Literature in the United States, which was to be published by a Communist publishing house, is a comment on the spirit of those times which needs no explanation.

Now, actually, the anthology contained a miscellany of fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism, which was

unified by a common denominator--that is, its materials were of social criticism or social protest. The term proletarian literature was the subject of much discussion at that time and down the years. What did it actually mean? According to Webster, a proletarian was a member of the wage-earning class. Now, could we say that a poem or story written by a worker or by a farm laborer was ipso facto a piece of proletarian writing? Well, in practice, what if the author was a southern white laborer who described with glee the lynching of a black man? Or if a middle-class writer presented a play sympathetic to the cause of coal miners, as I did in my play Black Pit--did that make it a proletarian play and make me a proletarian writer? Actually it was a term that defied accurate definition and yet was used constantly. Joseph Freeman, in his introduction to the volume Proletarian Literature in the United States wrote this: "Often the writer who describes the contemporary world from the viewpoint of the proletariat is not himself a worker. War, unemployment, a widespread social economic crisis drive middle-class writers into the ranks of the proletariat. Their experience becomes contiguous to or identical with that of the working class. They see their former life and the life of everyone around them with new

eyes. Their grasp of experience is conditioned by the class to which they have now attached themselves. They write from the viewpoint of the revolutionary proletariat. They create what is called proletarian literature." That's the end of the quotation.

Well, there are some inaccuracies here. In the first place, Freeman was making an assumption that because of the Depression, middle-class writers were being driven into the ranks of the proletariat. Well, actually I can't remember any writers who particularly . . . well, there were some writers, let's say, who when they came upon hard times took factory jobs for a while, like Ben Field, or became a carpenter, like Alexander Saxton. But whatever the temporary financial difficulties during the Depression, or the need to go on WPA, most of the middle-class writers who felt sympathetic to the working class and who wrote about problems of the working class remained what they were: they remained middle-class people. So that this was an inaccurate description of what was happening.

But in actuality, in practice, when Freeman says that "they write from the viewpoint of the revolutionary proletariat," in practice what this meant was they-- in practice, this viewpoint of a revolutionary proletariat became the Communist party political line at

any given moment. For instance, if you had someone who wrote a play, as I did, or if you had someone who wrote a play or a novel that was approved by writers on the Daily Worker and the New Masses, they would say, "This is a fine novel or story about the proletariat, this is a proletarian writer." If the same writer the next year wrote, and his particular point of view was not in accord with that of the Communist party political line, he would no longer be granted that term of approval--proletarian writer. So in fact this was a definition that meant nothing in theory and, in practice, meant something extremely narrow. I'll pause for a moment. [tape recorder turned off] Long before I left the Communist party on political grounds, I decided that the word proletarian literature was meaningless, and I ceased to use it as a description of anything. However, I never tried to raise a discussion of it in print because my writing interests lay elsewhere.

Now, during the general period I've been discussing, my own effort to write fiction was advancing quite successfully. In 1935, when my last full-length play was produced, I published my first two short stories. One of them, "Man on a Road," was reprinted in The Best

[American] Short Stories of 1936 and to date has been reprinted over fifty times in other anthologies and magazines, and in many countries. It was also reprinted in the Fifty Best Short Stories of 1915 to 1939.

GARDNER: Say something more about "Man on a Road" first. I'll ask you a couple of things about it.

MALTZ: Oh, yes, there are a lot of things I can say about it, but. . . .

GARDNER: First, was it based on an actual event?

MALTZ: Yes, I should have mentioned that, I guess.

"Man on a Road" came about in the following manner.

I was driving in West Virginia from a southern part of the state up to an area of the soft-coal mining section called Scotts Run where I wanted to do some research for Black Pit. And I picked up a man who was a miner. As we passed through a town called Gauley Bridge, he told me of the tragedy that had occurred there when a great many unemployed miners living in the town had gone to work, very happily, for a company that was building a tunnel through a mountain. Unknown to the men, the tunnel was made of a great deal of silica, which caused a dust that got into their lungs, and they were not issued any masks while doing this work with steam hammers. And as a result, men contracted silicosis, and by the time the job had ended--I think it took about a year--

many of them were fatally ill. I recall his describing to me the fact (I believe I recall accurately) that he told me that in a . . . not dissection--what do pathologists do? I forget the word.

GARDNER: Dissect?

MALTZ: Not dissection . . . in a . . .

GARDNER: Autopsy?

MALTZ: . . . in an autopsy of a man who had died of silicosis, the doctor took his lungs and put them on the ground, and they stood erect from the amount of silica in them. I now forget how many men had already died and how many had contracted it, but it was a blight on the whole town. When I got back to New York-- Oh, during my stay in Scotts Run, while doing my research (I was there for about a week), I got the idea for the story "Man on a Road." Sitting nights in a hot little crib of a hotel room, I wrote it on the back of the hotel stationery and finished it within that week. But when I got back to New York, I told some friends on the New York Post about this, and nothing came of it. So I then told someone I knew who worked for a labor wire service which no longer is in existence. This wire service not only sent material to other papers but it published a weekly of its own. And it sent a reporter down to Gauley Bridge and he came back with

material on this. They ran it serially in their newspaper, and as a result of these stories a congressional investigation came about. And at the time of a congressional vote about it . . . on the subject, these articles and my short story were put on the desk of every congressman to acquaint them with the facts. Well, that's it. That's about all.

GARDNER: That's fine. No, I had read that--that it was used during those hearings--but I also had wondered whether or not that had come from an original conversation.

MALTZ: Yes, it did.

GARDNER: Because, to me, one of the most fascinating things was the capturing of the language of the hitchhiker, which was remarkable for a writer who was really from such a more academic kind of New York sort of background.

MALTZ: Well, I'll tell you, one of the things that I did, when I say I did research, was always to try and capture the language of the people I was talking to. For instance, in the mine area, where a great many of the miners were Slavic-born, I wrote down the way in which they spoke and practiced it. So that when I came back from those fields, I could talk like any Slavic miner who. . . .

GARDNER: As in Black Pit.

MALTZ: Yes, as in Black Pit. And when I went South, I not only tried to practice southern speech, but when I stopped off for a night at a hotel, for instance, I would speak like a southerner to the hotel clerk and ask him for a room, just in an effort to command it. Well, it's just one of the things that writers do, you know, many writers--nothing unusual about it. Well, go on.

In 1937 I published two more short stories, one of them in the New Yorker and a novelette in Story magazine. The title of the latter was "Season of Celebration," but Story magazine, on its own, changed it to "Hotel Raleigh, the Bowery." The following year it was printed together with four other novelettes in a Book-of-the-Month selection called The Flying Yorkshireman. The title of the anthology was also the title of one of the novelettes by Eric Knight, and this brings me to another topic, which is what I would call "lost works of literature."

In the late twenties, when I was a student at Columbia University, a professor of English there, Raymond Weaver, rediscovered Moby Dick. It had been a forgotten book. And in fact Herman Melville did no

writing the last twenty years of his life because he was so disappointed in his career. Now, when I started to write, there were works that I studied and that I loved and that had an influence over me. One of them was The Seven Who Were Hanged by Leonid Andreyev; the second was a volume of Galsworthy's short stories; another was a volume of de Maupassant's short stories; and then there was the work of Liam O'Flaherty. I would be fairly sure that Andreyev's The Seven Who Were Hanged and the works of O'Flaherty are not on the reading lists of college majors in English these days. And I know that when I visited England in the year 1959, Galsworthy, I was told by my literary agent there, was read only by high school boys; whereas I considered him, then and now, to be a major writer of the English language.

Now, Eric Knight's marvelous mix of fantasy, humor and tenderness in The Flying Yorkshireman and in Never Come Monday and other stories I should imagine are foreign to readers today--including, say, majors in English literature--and this is a very sad phenomenon. I remember meeting in 1962 a PhD student of English literature at UCLA who had already taught a year at Princeton in the English department and who asked me, among other questions, whether I thought he ought to read some of the short stories of Erskine Caldwell. Now, for anyone in the

thirties and forties to teach English literature and not to know the stories of Erskine Caldwell was unheard of. But here, in '62, this completely earnest, hard-working man had not been called upon in any of his courses to read those stories.

I've tried to wonder if there's any solution to this problem. Because as one goes along, there are always new books coming out, and there's the pressure to read new books that are being written about and talked about. I think the Modern Library used to perform a considerable service in this regard by maintaining in print worthy books that were of the past; and Everyman, the Everyman series [Everyman's Library] in England did the same. And it's occurred to me that what we need is a government-subsidized, but not -supervised, edition that would be maintained in all universities, high schools, and public libraries in the land to keep alive work of literary merit. I think we're better off in the field of records of classical music in this respect, where we're able to hear, not only the works of Beethoven, Bach and Brahms, and others of the top composers, but less great composers who nevertheless have written superb individual works. That is, I would hate not to be able to hear Pachelbel's Canon in D as I would hate to have missed Gorky's

extraordinary story Birth of a Man and Eric Knight's The Flying Yorkshireman. With this modest little suggestion, I leave it to future generations to try and solve the problem.

One of the phenomena of the thirties and early forties was the coming to the United States of some of the outstanding intellectuals of Europe--from Germany, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other countries. Many were Jews, like Einstein; others were not, but were purely political refugees, like Thoman Mann. Scientists, authors, scholars and teachers, psychiatrists, social scientists--it was an immigration of intellect into our land such as I think the world has never seen into any other land. It was of enormous benefit to the United States. It is, for instance, dubious if the atom bomb (whatever we may think of it now) would have been constructed by the time it was without the contribution of foreign physicists. The realistic assessments made by these outstanding intellectuals of the nature of the Nazi regime was also of a great deal of importance in fashioning political consciousness here. Among those refugees that I personally came to know were the former Minister of Justice of the state of Prussia; Franz Weiskopf, a Czech author and critic of whom I will speak later.

(By the way, Clifford Odets unashamedly stole a short story of Weiskopf's that was printed in the New Masses, and he fashioned it into his one-act play Till the Day I Die. I know about this because Weiskopf and I had a mutual agent, and the agent got after Odets for it, and Odets paid up.) Two other refugees I knew were both Czechs. One was Egon Erwin Kisch, a very urbane journalist who published not a few books that are most engaging reading.

The second could be called a--well, the second was a political leader who had two names. André Simon was one name under which he had published a book in France that was translated into English and which I read in the mid-thirties, a book on political events in the world. His other name, and real name apparently, was Otto Katz. And he came here in the middle thirties to raise money for the German underground. After the war was over, he went back to Czechoslovakia and there became editor of the official Communist party newspaper. He then in 1952 was one of the Czech leaders arrested and put on trial with the secretary of the Communist party, Slansky, and he "confessed" in court to the lies of having been both a British and a Zionist agent against Czechoslovakia, and he was hanged.

Finally, I would mention Karl Billinger and his wife, Hede Massing. Billinger was a tall, handsome, blond German who had been a teaching functionary, on a minor level, of the Communist party of Germany, had spent a year in a German concentration camp, and then had been allowed to go free. The Nazis did that sometimes in the early years. He escaped from Germany then with the aid of his wife and came to the United States. His book, Fatherland, had been published here around the year '36, I guess, and I was one of those who read it and was enormously impressed with it. Subsequently I met him, and it came about that he and his wife, and my wife and I, became friends. I valued them very much and learned a great deal from him.

In the year 1939, I believe, they took a trip to the Soviet Union, and when they returned, they were changed people. They didn't want to speak about what was going on in the Soviet Union, but we gathered that they had learned things that were tremendously distressing to them. I no longer recall whether they let drop some hints or I found out subsequently that what they had learned was that many German refugees whom they had known at home, and who had gone to the Soviet Union, had disappeared into Stalin's concentration

camps or had been shot. The result of this was that Billinger retired from public life and, so far as I know, from any position on politics. When I last heard of him, he was teaching at a small college. But his wife, Hede Massing--I don't know whether they remained married--became a very active informer for the FBI. Her anti-Soviet hatred took her to the point where she appeared as a witness in various trials against left-wingers. I guess that about covers that point for the moment.

In the spring of 1937 the second conference of the--Second Congress, not conference--of the League of American Writers took place. I would say that this was the high-water mark of Communist party leadership among the nation's writers. For instance, at the large public mass meeting at Carnegie Hall among the speakers were Hemingway, Vincent Sheean and Archibald MacLeish. What this congress was essentially was a mobilization of writers to express antifascist political sentiments, and sentiments in favor of the Loyalist side in Spain. Now, although in the course of the several days there were working panels on literary matters--and I recall Dashiell Hammett reading a quite fascinating paper on tempo in writing--it was primarily an assembly of writers for common political purposes. Unfortunately,

I no longer have the publications, the books, that resulted from these congresses, although they must be in some libraries.

In the summer of 1937 Margaret Larkin and I took a small cottage in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where our only lighting was kerosene lamps, and I went to work writing intensively on The Underground Stream. I finished a first draft by the end of summer. I think I might mention that I had a certain formulated approach to the writing of that first novel, a general theory of writing, which consisted of the following.

First, I wanted to avoid the dangers of journalistic writing by writing every novel as though it was a historical novel. That is to say, my purpose was not to affect current events by my novel in the way in which a writer might try to affect current events by writing an editorial or a leaflet or an article, or by the way in which John Wexley wrote They Shall Not Die. I had nothing against anybody doing that kind of work.

GARDNER: You just didn't want to do it yourself.

MALTZ: But I didn't want to write a novel in that manner. I wanted it to have, if possible, those qualities that might make someone want to read it ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now, when the current events that were going on had been forgotten. Secondly, I felt

that the richest and most profound work came from novels that provided characters in their social setting-- the reason for this being that characters do not live, let's say, purely within themselves, but they live at a given time and place and that they can't help but be influenced by the world, the city, the country, the town in which they live. Now, War and Peace is perhaps the best example of a major novel that embodies this. On the other hand, I loved Look Homeward, Angel as a novel, and I loved stories of interpersonal relationship by Chekhov and de Maupassant. But on the other hand, I rejected the thesis of those who felt that dealing with social materials was not art. I couldn't see why the dramatization of social injustice was not as valid a subject for literary materials as the dramatization of a love affair. And it's interesting that those who have accepted war novels as art . . . (I guess I have to get a piece of paper) . . . [tape recorder turned off] . . . now reject strike novels as propaganda.

After completing the first draft of The Underground Stream, I circulated a few carbon copies among friends for the next month. Those were the days, of course, before Xerox machines, and only if you lived through the work of making carbon copies and trying to

get the best carbon paper and the best and the thinnest paper so that you would eke out five or six copies, perhaps, that were legible, do you appreciate Xerox machines as I do now. And it's always been my practice to ask for reactions, when I finish a manuscript, from selected friends because I would much rather make changes in a book before it's published than say afterwards, "I wish I had thought of that." And on the basis of the comments I received, I decided to do a considerable revision.

But I delayed work on it because in the early fall I was offered the chance to do some part-time teaching, and the money that would be involved was something important to me. The offer came through my friend Michael Blankfort, who had been doing this teaching at the adult extension division of New York University in downtown Washington Square. He had decided to go to Hollywood to try and improve his financial fortunes there and had suggested me to the dean of the adult education school, whom I visited and who found me acceptable.

GARDNER: Do you remember the name of that person?

MALTZ: The dean? I don't.

GARDNER: If you don't, don't worry about it.

MALTZ: A marvelous man, a lovely man, but I don't remember his name. The class I taught at first, because subsequently I enlarged the number of classes, was one to which anyone could be admitted who wanted to sign up. I prepared lecture notes with great care so that the first ten sessions of the course were just occupied with my lectures on basic playwriting. It was a two-hour course that met once a week at night. I gave a writing assignment, at first merely an exercise, and secondly, a one-act play. I read all of the work and either wrote written comments or had personal interviews before and after the class with the individuals--not interviews, but personal sessions with the individuals. And this continued for that semester and went on later. I guess I might mention that I continued this right through the year 1940 . . . I continued this until the spring of 1941. And the classes grew. I established a workshop to which admission could only come on the basis of my having read a one-act play which I felt had some merit, and so I had a round table of about twelve students. By the second year it required two such sessions, two round tables, so that, in all, by the end of the first year I was teaching three courses about six hours a week on two different

nights. And I found that I enjoyed teaching very much. Now, although this is not a personal autobiography, it's necessary to give certain personal data. Late in 1937 Margaret and I decided to adopt a child, and for that reason we got married. Now to a larger subject.

I don't know whether it was because of my reading of Let History Judge by Roy A. Medvedev (a book I have mentioned before) that I came to the conclusions I am going to discuss now, or whether I had come to the conclusion myself and then found it fortified in my reading of the book. But it is my belief that German fascism would not have achieved power if not for Stalin and for Stalin's theory of social fascism. We have to go back to the end of World War I, in which various efforts were made to establish Communist governments--one in Germany and the other in Hungary. And the Socialist party in each country sided with the government in power to put down these uprisings. Now, it was the international socialist movement that had really betrayed the European working-class movement in World War I by supporting the war. Not long before the war began there was a meeting of the Socialist International, and it was agreed that the Socialists would not support their governments in any way which they declared in advance

would be an imperialist war. But when only a few months later the war broke out, the Socialist parties of Germany, Austria, Hungary, France, Italy, Britain all violated their own agreement and proceeded with patriotic fervor to support the war. In the light of these events Stalin, who was not only the leader of the Soviet Union but was the head of the Comintern (which was the international association of Communist parties of the world), promulgated the theory of social fascism. To quote Let History Judge: "At the beginning of the thirties Stalin came down hardest on the left Social Democrats who enjoyed considerable influence among the working class in several European countries. He called them the most dangerous part of social democracy because they concealed their opportunism with phoney revolutionism and thus drew the people away from the Communists. . . . " The practical result of calling the Socialists in these countries social fascists, which was the Stalin doctrine, was that in practice there could be no unity between the Communist party of Germany and the Socialist party in the face of the Hitler threat. The Communists advocated a united front with Socialists, but only from below--not with their leadership. Well, of course, this caused the Socialists to warn their rank and file against any unity with

the Communists. Even worse, the Communists set up separate trade unions and thus split the working class; instead of, let's say, having their workers remain in the Socialist unions, they drew them apart from the Socialist unions into Red. . . .

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SEPTEMBER 20, 1978

MALTZ: Now, if there was any possible justification for the phrase "social fascists" in the late twenties, or in the twenties, and even in the early thirties-- to maintain that attitude, and to maintain separate trade unions, in the face of a rising Hitler movement was to be completely blind to realities. Again, to quote Let History Judge: "All the Social Democratic workers everywhere were not only insulted to the depth of their souls, they were infuriated by the communist position. And they could not forgive the Communists for this. The theory of social fascism month by month week by week was paving the way for Hitler."

GARDNER: Now at this time, though, you would have been very much in Stalin's . . .

MALTZ: Well, actually, it's very interesting about me personally. When the Theatre Union began, the word social fascist was also used in the United States. And indeed the other countries, like Germany, but not in such a critical situation, had carried out a similar principle. The American Communist party had set up left-wing trade unions, set up Communist-led trade

unions, in certain industries especially in the light of the AF of L maintaining craft unions. But first of all, in 1934 when I was out in the coal fields, I ran into this in practice, and I remember a Communist party organizer on a low level saying to me, "This policy of maintaining our trade union is crazy. Now that the United Mine Workers has been recognized by the NRA, the miners are just going into [John L.] Lewis's union, and we've got to dissolve our union and go into that, too. I keep telling them up in Pittsburgh, and they're not paying any attention to me." So I listened to what this man said, who was on the ground, and I thought this made sense. And secondly, we in the Theatre Union, without any instruction from anybody, had come to our own united front back in 1933. We didn't need the debacle of fascism coming to power to take a more intelligent course. So that I heard this doctrine of social fascism but, you see, by the time I really came around--let me see, the Reichstag fire . . . seems to me that it was . . . yes, it was in '34, I believe . . .

GARDNER: Well, that's easily verified.

MALTZ: Yes, I know because one of my first acts when I came--no, it seems to me--was it '32? No, seems to me in '33 I was in a meeting protesting the burning of books in Germany after the Reichstag fire . . . it

must have been '33. In any instance, the main point here was that--I said the early thirties, I was wrong . . . no. . . . Well, I'll correct it later. The main point is that this doctrine of social fascism helped keep the German working class split. There were even certain moments when, on issues in the Reichstag, I know the Communist party voted on the same side as the Nazi party on certain issues. And there was a general attitude that the Nazis were so nutty that if they came to power they would fall out of their own stupidity within a few months. There was not the awareness of what was going to happen. And so, looking back, this indictment of Stalin is a most profound one because from Hitler-fascism came World War II. And if this could have been avoided by a united German working class, humanity would have been saved, I guess, the cruelest period of its whole history.

GARDNER: The many tens of millions killed. . . .

MALTZ: Incredible. Incredible the amount of human suffering and destruction. So I think with that . . .

GARDNER: . . . on that cheery note . . . [laughter]

MALTZ: . . . we'll call it a day.

SECOND PART (October 3, 1978)

MALTZ: I'd like to make a correction of the last point

I made in our previous session. I believe I said that the Stalin policy of declaring the Social Democrats to be social fascists--which resulted in separate Communist trade unions, in a united front only from below and not between the leaderships--paved the way, or brought about, Hitler-fascism. And I want to amend this to say that it was one of the factors that contributed to the conquest of power by Hitlerism, but that I think I had an overemphasis on it in the first way I put it because there certainly were other important contributing factors.

I'd like to mention that in the general period of 1935 to 1939 people on the Left and, I would say, people who were liberal and not further left than that, were all affected to some extent, and some quite profoundly, by the songs of the period which came out of the Left. For instance, the songs that came out of Spain, out of the International Brigades and the Lincoln Brigade and so on, were not only played at meetings having to do with Spain but they became records and people played them in their homes and played them for friends; and they cannot be discounted as factors that contributed a good deal of emotion to the political feeling of the time. One song, "The Peat Bog Soldiers," was a song that had come out of

one of the concentration camps in Germany for politicals where the inmates worked at cutting peat in, apparently, a very harsh climate. And the song, which was somber, and yet lively as a marching song, and which was strong, gave a sense of men who were prisoners who were doing work that was hard and that they certainly didn't want to do, but men who had an indomitable will to survive and triumph, and they were marching with their heads unbowed. And even today when I hear that song I react to it. It was during this period that Pete Seeger, who has been such a durable figure in our cultural scene, first emerged as one of a group that involved Woody Guthrie and the Almanac Singers. And his songs and the songs of the whole group were emotionally affecting.

GARDNER: Did you know them personally?

MALTZ: I didn't know any of them at the time. I once shook hands with Pete Seeger, but I've never known him. The only one I knew of that group, and subsequently, was Millard Lampell, and he left singing to do writing. But he was the man who wrote the words to "The [Lonesome] Train," to which Earl Robinson wrote the music, and I knew him. It's very interesting, by the way, that Woody Guthrie, about whom a film was made, and who's become a symbol of Americana in a way, during the

thirties wrote . . . I think it was a daily column, or maybe a weekly column, for the People's World which was the West Coast Communist party newspaper. This period saw the national applause for the "Ballad for Americans," first sung by Paul Robeson, a song to words by John LaTouche and music by Earl Robinson, and was sung at the Republican National Convention in, I guess it was, 1936. I've mentioned "The [Lonesome] Train," which was, I think, a beautiful work. And then there was the song "The House I Live In," to which Earl Robinson also wrote the music, and the words, interestingly (and I think I may have mentioned this earlier), were written by a man whose pen name was Lewis Allan. Lewis Allan also had written the words to that terrible and yet beautiful--agonizing and yet beautiful--song "Strange Fruit," which Billie Holiday made famous. And Lewis Allan's real name was Meeropol. Let's pause while I get his first name. [tape recorder turned off] Lewis Allan's real name was Abel Meeropol, and he and his wife, Anne, were the couple who adopted the two children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg after they were executed. And the two sons [Michael and Robert] go by the name of Meeropol today. I have often thought that there is a great novel to be written about that saga of adopting those

children.

GARDNER: There have been a couple of novels written about the. . . .

MALTZ: Yes, there was one, to me slanderous one which a great many people like, written by [E. L.] Doctorow. What's the name of it?

GARDNER: I've forgotten.

MALTZ: Yes, I have it on my shelves.

GARDNER: The Book of Daniel.

MALTZ: That's right, The Book of Daniel. I find a great many people like it. I don't like it. I think it's pretentiously written, and I think it's a slander on the children. I think it's disgraceful.

Now, going on. . . . During this period (I'm now specifically thinking of 1938) the terrible struggle in Spain continued, and although there wasn't the coverage of TV that we had in the Vietnam War, there was intense newspaper and magazine coverage. And in addition to what one might call regular reporting, a great many individuals who were sympathetic to the Loyalists went over to Spain and, because they were prominent, were given newspaper and magazine space in which to write about those events. So that you had reporting by Hemingway and Dorothy Parker and Martha Gellhorn and Lillian Hellman and a great many others. I think it

is accurate to say that millions of people in the world felt the agony of the Spanish Republican citizens trying to defeat fascism against what proved to be insuperable odds. In spite of the fact that--oh, at the same. . . . There also were a number of films made, one of them being The Spanish Earth, which was made by Joris Ivens, [who was] a Dutch documentary filmmaker, and Hemingway, about the struggle. It was a most affecting film that was shown quite widely here, but of course not in regular commercial outlets. Now, in spite of the fact that President Roosevelt, seeking the Catholic vote, maintained the policy of nonintervention in the civil war, public opinion in the United States moved increasingly to the side of the Loyalists and for an end to nonintervention. A Gallup poll before the end of the war showed 76 percent of the American people in favor of lifting the arms embargo. Would you shut off for a moment. [tape recorder turned off] I'm quoting now from The Cold War and Its Origins by Fleming, page 66 . . .

GARDNER: Let me stop you a second. [tape recorder turned off]

MALTZ: Quoting from The Cold War and Its Origins, page 66, Fleming says that the nonintervention policy that Roosevelt followed was to be "the outstanding

blot on the diplomatic record of the Roosevelt Administrations. Former Under Secretary of State Welles wrote in his Time for Decision that it was 'the cardinal error' of the long Roosevelt-Hull conduct of our foreign affairs--'of all our blind isolationist policies, the most disastrous.'" Fleming continues: "Certainly it was a blunder which tied the United States in deeply with the policy of steady surrender to fascist conquests. With our aid the sacrifice of the Spanish people was nullified and they were restored to the ruthless rule of the old regime." I might say that it became increasingly clear to, let's say, us on the Left who agreed with the thinking of the Communist party that the struggle in Spain was a prelude to World War II.

In addition to the songs of the period and the films like Spanish Earth, there were various speakers who came back from the front and toured the country raising funds. One of them was an English novelist, Ralph Bates, who had been a political commissar with the British volunteers to the Republican side, and he was an astonishing orator--one of the greatest I have ever heard. I remember an evening at Carnegie Hall, with every seat taken, in which he spoke for about two hours without pause on all of the questions involved in the war, and it was an overwhelming experience.

It turned out several months later that Bates needed a place to stay, and this came to the attention of Margaret and myself, and we invited him to sleep on a couch that we had in our dining room. He moved in, and about a week later a girl moved in with him, and the two seemed to make out comfortably on this small couch and were there for about three months. It was, of course, a tremendous experience for me to have breakfast with him every morning and talk over events.

A second speaker was an American woman who had been a nurse on the Madrid front. Her name was Lini DeVries. She came back early in 1938 to raise funds for ambulances and medical aid, and I met her at that time. I mention it now because our lives touched a good deal subsequently, and we have been friends ever since.

During this period the British and the French continued their appeasement of German fascism in the rest of Europe. Twice in the fall of 1937 Hitler told the British ambassador that the first and last German objective was unification with Austria. Meanwhile the Soviet delegate to the League of Nations, [Maxim] Litvinov, kept pleading for collective security against fascism. The French and the British ignored him. On

March 7, 1938, Chamberlain, the British premier, said the following in Parliament: "We must not try to delude small and weak nations into thinking that they will be protected by the League," (meaning the League of Nations), "against aggression."

Almost at once, German troops marched into Austria. "Marched into Austria" is just a phrase, but for us at the time it was a matter of day-to-day radio and newspaper and magazine information about concrete events of a dreadful nature: the establishment of concentration camps for left-wingers, with all of the ferocious brutality within the barbed wire perimeters that we now knew about from the work of Billinger and others; the desperate efforts of Jews to leave the country, in most cases fruitless efforts because of doors closed to them in other countries; the swastika appearing everywhere; the Brownshirts; the book burnings; the dismissal of Jewish and left-wing academicians from all schools, universities, and institutes, and so on. We of that generation lived with this barbarism day by day--felt it, hated it, abominated it. These events could not but bind me and others closer to the Soviet Union because of its steady efforts to achieve collective security to stop fascism and also because of its position against anti-Semitism.

I think this is perhaps a good moment to say something about this, especially since the anti-Semitism now present in the Soviet Union is manifested in various ways. This is a change from the Soviet Union in its earlier days. One of the first acts of Lenin after the Bolsheviks took power was to make a Victrola record in which he attacked anti-Semitism and explained its political uses by reactionaries in Russia. The old Bolsheviks knew very well that anti-Semitism had been used by the czarist establishment as a means of diverting the Russian people from their own woes. And the Soviet Union in its early years and, I think, right up through World War II, was singularly free from anti-Semitism as compared to czarist Russia. In fact it was a crime punishable by imprisonment to express anti-Semitic attitudes. I won't try to go into the reasons why this changed from the years since the end of World War II until now, but it has changed. Certainly the Soviet Union is not today anti-Semitic in the way in which Hitler's Germany was--light years away from that. Nevertheless there are marked expressions of anti-Semitism there. However, in the thirties this wasn't so, and it was therefore a powerful contrast to the policies of fascism.

It was during 1938 that the League of American Writers, on which I continued to function as a member

of the executive board, established a committee to aid exiled writers and raised funds and used all influence it had to bring them safely to the United States. I remember I wrote something for the league on this issue. I no longer recall what it was, but I presume it was some sort of public statement that the league gave out. This committee helped bring a good number of writers to this country.

During this same period my own writing progressed in the marketplace. I wrote a short story "The Happiest Man on Earth" which was published by Harper's magazine and was reprinted in the annual anthology called O'Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories. It received first prize for the year 1938, and it got all the more attention because the second prize was won by Richard Wright and the third by John Steinbeck. And I might say that the \$300 that came with the prize was very happily received by me at that time. [laughter]

GARDNER: I'm sure.

MALTZ: Yes. I don't know what that \$300 would come to today; maybe it would be \$3,000.

GARDNER: Probably.

MALTZ: But that's the way it felt, I'm sure. That short story has since been very widely reprinted. Let's find out how much. [tape recorder turned off] That

story has been reprinted some eighty times since its first publication, and the reprintings continue.

I finished a one-act play called Rehearsal, which received amateur productions and was published in One-Act Play magazine. And a long one-act play, Transit, was written by my friend Philip Stevenson, which was a dramatization of my novelette "Season of Celebration," and this received quite a number of amateur productions.

During that year I published a first volume of short stories, The Way Things Are. I think it merits a personal comment. I think it was just a sense of inferiority on my part that made me say yes to an offer by International Publishers to publish a volume of my stories instead of my seeking a regular publisher. Now, by "regular" I mean one of the publishing houses that was in the mainstream of American publishing and published materials of every sort. International Publishers was the Communist publishing house. Its materials were almost exclusively books on Marxism or books written by authors whose position was a Marxist one. And as I look back, it just seems incomprehensible on my part, and perhaps even more incomprehensible on the part of my agent, to have agreed to give a book of stories to this publishing house. Perhaps if I had already received the O'Henry Memorial Award before I arranged for the book publication I might not have

done it. In any instance, I did do so, and it's a comment on what I was personally at that time--which is a quite different man than I am today. Now we'll pause and I'll get some reviews.

GARDNER: Okay. [tape recorder turned off]

MALTZ: Alfred Kazin, writing in the New York Tribune on July 24, 1938, said: "Albert Maltz's favorite subject is pain--the appearance of pain, the conditions of pain. Yet it is because he writes out of a hot, lacerated fury that never raises to a scream that these few stories are so burningly effective." The New York Post on July 20: "Albert Maltz is one of the best and most considerable of the proletarian writers, and his short stories, including the novella 'Season of Celebration,' have been highly praised . . . a collection called The Way Things Are deals with the woes of the underprivileged and downtrodden and with much more art than is usual in books of this character." Harry Hansen in the World-Telegram, July 19: "Albert Maltz is a thirty-year-old playwright whose short stories are vivid proof that proletarian fiction is marching on. Lots of us have heard of Bowery flop houses, but no one has seen the inside of one until he reads Maltz's 'Season of Celebration,' the first of eight short stories that make up his book. The spectacle of these broken

men and jobless youths paying their dimes and quarters into Baldy White's chicken-wire cage to get a place to sleep shows with what a keen eye Albert Maltz sizes up the unfortunates of city life."

I would say that other reviews went along in this vein, but there was one that was rather different, and that was by Fred R. Miller in the New Republic, August 17, 1938: "Proletarians have their fun as well as their hard knocks, but you never would suspect it reading these eight stories. Disease, degradation, death--if there were nothing else to the proletarian lot there would by this year of capitalism be no proletariat for Maltz to write about. Such a preoccupation with the black is unwholesome, obsessive, defeating its own purpose. For while the sympathy poured out over the underdog is genuine enough and open to respect, anyone who has ever been one himself must find this group portrait of sad underdogs lopsided and, that being so, atypical. So the idea is not to read the book at one fell sitting. Collectively, the stories have an exasperating sameness of tone; but individually, they move you, if you can be readily moved, and one of them, 'Man on a Road' is, to quote the literary editor, 'absolutely first rate. The best story the New Masses ever printed.'"

Now, I think that this critic had an important comment to make. The title of the book was The Way Things Are and he was saying, looked at as a whole, this isn't the way things are, and he was right. Today if I used that title on a book, I would want the volume to have many different facets. And mine did not. I might say in passing that the fact that a book published by International got the reviews that my short stories did is a comment on the temper of the times. In the year 1938 in the United States there was infinitely more hospitality to a book published by the Left than there was to be in subsequent years. And I was to find that out in the sixties, as I will mention when I come to it.

Again, a literary point--there is always a lag between writing and publication: in the case of a short story, from two to six months or longer; in the case of a novel, eight months to a year. So when I speak of a volume of stories coming out like The Way Things Are in July 1938, it means that the volume was completed at least by November 1937. During 1938 I was working on my first novel, The Underground Stream, which was published in June 1940. This means it was completed by October 1939. And I just mention that for general understanding.

GARDNER: That's interesting too from the point of view of someone who is trying to write or who is writing material that's timely.

MALTZ: Oh, yes. That's a really important point. Because I sometimes have had people come to me and say, "I'm so excited about such-and-such material. It's got to be written about. Somebody has to say so-and-so, and I'm going to do it." And I would say, "Now, look, how long do you think it will take you to do it? Will it take maybe six months with rewriting? Okay, six months. And then it's going to take anywhere from eight to twelve months to publish it if you get a publisher. So if you add six to six to eight in order to be conservative, you're talking about twenty months. What's going to happen to this situation? Will it be in anybody's mind twenty months from now?"

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: That's a tremendously important thing. And furthermore, one always hopes that something you write will have some life to it, that it will be read a little longer than the day after you publish it.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: So what's going to interest people? And that's where the desire to comment on immediate situations is a trap for a writer.

GARDNER: Right. There's got to be a more general point of view--a timelessness rather than a timeliness.

MALTZ: That's right. I want to make mention of what I would call the gambler's aspect of a writer's life, and of the earnings of writers. A professional person of competence has financial security in a great many fields over a large portion of his adult life. (I'm assuming now that I'm talking about a country with a certain modicum of economic stability, the way the United States has been in all but the thirties.) For instance, an attorney, physician, an engineer, accountant, a business executive, a librarian, a civil servant, an educator, a newspaperman in general will, as they go along in their profession from youth to middle age, earn more and will have a general sense of stability in their job. A competent physician could certainly expect to have a going practice at the age of fifty, fifty-five, and sixty. None of this is true of the free-lance writer--that is, a novelist, playwright, a short-story writer, a writer of articles. And it is even less true by far of the poet. The writer's economic life and his work satisfactions--both of them are closely akin to those of a gambler. (Now, in parentheses I would say that this is also true to an even greater extent of the fine arts--that is, of painting and sculpture. It's also true in

theater and film for actors, directors, and set designers. But I will deal here only with writers.) The best-sellers and the enormous sums of money made by a sprinkling of writers who've hit the jackpot is no indication whatsoever of the economic realities of 95 percent of writers. For this reason professional writers who have been published often, who have been celebrated because of their work, also need to teach, write for TV or radio or for movies or for advertising agencies, need to give lectures, and work at an infinite variety of other jobs.

There are tremendous ups and downs, both in income and in work satisfaction, for writers. For instance, I recall that in 1937, unable to pay the modest phone bills that I had (which probably at that time amounted to no more than about ten dollars a month), I had the phone removed from my apartment. I made business calls from a phone on the ground floor of the building, and it was not easy for anybody to reach me. But about ten days later, a story sold and I was able to put the phone back. In the summer of 1938 when I was in Las Vegas, New Mexico, I was unable to see anything of the surrounding countryside because I didn't have a car. And this was a great shame because close by Las Vegas was beautiful country, and quite close were cities, towns like Taos and Santa Fe and so on. In Las Vegas at that time mail was delivered

on the Fourth of July, and on that day I had a check for about \$900 from the Book-of-the-Month Club selection of The Flying Yorkshireman. As a result, we were able to get a car and see things that were part of important experiences for me. Now, in terms of work satisfaction, a lawyer, a librarian, an educator, and so on can note daily that he has done work that is of value; but even a Eugene O'Neill wrote plays that were never put on stage. To labor for weeks over a story and have it rejected, and for years over a novel and have it unpublished, or perhaps published and then to have it drop like a stone in a well--which is what happens to most novels--is very discouraging.

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GARDNER: We were talking about the vagaries of the writer.

MALTZ: The free-lance writer's life. It takes fortitude to go on to the next story and the next novel. Most writers, even those with considerable reputations, produce all of their lives without having a novel that's commercially successful in a big or even a medium way. I have had literary work published in over thirty languages; but I could not have lived down the years or supported a family on my earnings from it. I've had to supplement it, and this is the only reason I've spent the years I have working on screenplays. Yet there is another side to a writer's life that is a most important counterbalance to all of the problems that I've been mentioning: his work is never monotonous, never repetitive, never dull, never without challenge. Each day's work demands the maximum use of whatever talent he has, and there are daily satisfactions in pages written, even though the wait may be long for the work to be completed and published. And there's always a dream that a serious author has: that his work will live and will be read in the future. I know that I am very pleased that my novel The Cross

and the Arrow has been constantly in print in one or more countries since it was first published thirty-five years ago. And naturally I hope that this will continue. I think if I had a second life to live, I might decide to become a historian because the study of history has interested me so much. But I think if I had a third life to live, I'd go back again to being a writer. The good balances out the bad. But it is a gambler's life.

And a little footnote to all of this is a story about the very, very able novelist Meyer Levin. He wrote a novel called Citizens which he completed in the year 1939 and, like some other authors--Edna St. Vincent Millay being one of them--he had only one copy of it, and he left it in a taxicab and never could get it again. So he sat down, having spent two years in the writing of it, and spent another year rewriting it. And it was published on the day that Germany invaded the Low Countries and France, and consequently nobody read any book reviews and the book died instantly.

In the summer of 1938 when my wife and I went to Las Vegas, we found that the nurse, Lini DeVries, we had listened to as a speaker on Spain was now working in that town. She was working for the U.S. Public Health Service. Since I went with her on one of her days of work, I would like to mention the extraordinarily fine

work that the U.S. Public Health Service was doing at that time in New Mexico.

Outside of Las Vegas there's hill country, and the farmers who live in those areas are descendants of the Mexicans who had been living there in 1848 when the territory changed hands. They were illiterate in both languages. Lini took me to one village where, before the U.S. Public Health Service came in, there had been fifty child deaths in one summer from dysentery, the reason being that the people used to drink water from the irrigation ditches in which their cattle defecated. They had no knowledge whatsoever of elementary sanitation. The Public Health Service would send in a team with a film and with a microscope. The film would be a short education in the nature of microbes, and they would scoop some water out of the irrigation ditch and put it under the microscope and let every adult and child who wanted to take a look at what was swimming in the water that they were drinking. And they could then make the connection between what the film had told them and the realities of their lives. As a result, they cooperated at once in digging wells and in screening their homes from flies and in recognizing that the fly was an enemy of theirs. By doing this, in one year the child deaths from dysentery went from fifty down to two.

An essential requirement for the Public Health nurses working in these villages was to get the cooperation of the local priests and the local midwives; without that they could make no headway whatsoever. But they found that with the proper approach they got very warm cooperation. The midwives, for instance, were often very skilled in basic knowledge; but what they didn't know about were drops to put in the babies' eyes to prevent them from getting gonorrhea if one of their parents had it. So once it was established by the Public Health nurse that she was no danger to the functioning of the midwife and to the income of the midwife, then the midwife was very glad to accept these drops. And so on.

Another function of the Public Health nurses, and the doctors who came from time to time, was to find out which of the people had syphilis, which was apparently rather endemic in the area, and to have them come into Las Vegas once a week for shots. This became a rather gay expedition in which many of the young folks every week went in a truck to Las Vegas and had their shots and didn't think anything of it because so many people had need for the same. In spite of this vast improvement, I remember going into one small house with Lini on a day that was intensely hot and finding a woman in a spick-and-span house with a very young infant whom she had wrapped in layers of blankets and had

placed in front of a roaring hot fire. Why she did this, I have no knowledge--evidently thinking that the infant needed it to survive. But of course the child had prickly heat, and Lini persuaded the woman that it didn't need all of these covers.

In the fall of 1938 my wife and I moved to a very pleasant area in Queens called Sunnyside because that was where we could have a small balcony on which to put our young son, and it would be a pleasanter area for a child to grow up than where we had been living in Manhattan. During this period my teaching expanded. I now had a larger class for beginners and two workshops for those who had produced writing that merited their going on. The statistical chances of there being genuinely talented people from a classroom of hopeful writers is not too large; but a number of writers did emerge from my classes--one who's a moderately successful TV writer today and . . .

GARDNER: What's his name?

MALTZ: His name is Alfred Brenner. And one whom I had a great desire to help who was a gentle, New Jersey minister who wrote one-act plays solely designed for church productions, and who was doing it primarily to supplement his meager salary by the small royalties that he would get with each production. And I gave him a good deal of time in private sessions to try and help

him along the way because he touched me very much.

One very interesting character who was in my classes was Dr. Maxwell Maltz, the man who became celebrated for writing books on cybernetics--emotional [Psycho-Cybernetics] cybernetics, I guess. He was a very successful plastic surgeon and, I believe, a very skilled one, from certain references I have seen to his work. And he had the idea for a very interesting play based upon the life of an Italian physician who could properly be called the first plastic surgeon. His calling came about because he learned how to repair the noses and faces and ears of men who had been in sword fights. And some of the instruments, the surgical instruments that he devised to do this, are still in basic use today or in modified use. Also, this man was hailed before the Inquisition on the grounds that by repairing faces that had been injured he was interfering with the laws of God. And I don't particularly remember the outcome of the trial, but it formed an important part of the play.

I spent a great deal of time with Maxwell Maltz (and we became friends in the course of it) in an effort to get that play right, but he never did get it right so far as I was concerned. However, he got it put on himself some years later and it was not a success. (I learned from friends that he used to introduce himself as my cousin

in the years before he himself published his work on cybernetics; but he stopped calling himself my cousin when I got into political trouble later.)

We come now to the most terrible moment in the year 1938, which was the Munich Pact signed on the thirtieth of September. That day and that pact absolutely set the stage for World War II. As I mentioned earlier, in the fall of 1937 Hitler had told the British ambassador that incorporating Austria into Germany was his first and last objective. However, very shortly after he got his way in this, he began to raise demands about ethnic Germans who allegedly were being persecuted in the Sudeten border provinces of Czechoslovakia. In actual fact, these Sudeten Germans enjoyed all rights of other citizens in Czechoslovakia and were not being oppressed at all. The Sudeten region had tremendous fortifications on the Czech side that, later, German generals said they could not have taken at that time. In addition, the Sudeten region had 66 percent of the nation's coal, 80 percent of its lignite, 86 percent of its chemicals, 80 percent of its cement, 80 percent of its textiles, 70 percent of its iron and steel, 70 percent of its electrical power and 40 percent of its timber. We can begin to understand why Hitler was suddenly weeping over the condition of the Sudeten Germans.

With a series of increasing demands Hitler finally arrived at the insistence that the Sudeten borderlands had to be ceded by Czechoslovakia to Germany. Now Czechoslovakia, which had a well-trained army beside these fortifications, also had a military alliance with the Soviet Union and France obligating the latter two countries to come to its defense if attacked. I'm not going to recite the history of events here that led up to Munich. They will be found very succinctly related in volume 1 of The Origins of the Cold War by Fleming or in greater detail in The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich by William Shirer and many other books. But a summation is needed.

The dominant wing of the British establishment headed by Chamberlain tried constantly to push Germany toward a war with Russia. It was completely willing to have Germany get not only the Sudetenland but Czechoslovakia as a whole. The dominant wing of the French establishment wanted the same. Both therefore made clear to Czechoslovakia-- Oh, the French establishment therefore made clear to Czechoslovakia that it would repudiate its military alliance unless the Czechs gave in to the German demands. The Germans threatened to march, and the British and French ambassadors told the Czech president, [Eduard] Beneš, that Hungary and Poland would

also attack them. So although Russia had stood by its alliance and said it would fight, the Czech government gave in. German troops took over at once 11,000 square miles of territory, the tremendous fortifications and all of the industrial and mineral wealth I mentioned earlier. Poland and Hungary also got slices of Czechoslovakia. This was the immediate effect of Munich.

I recall that month of September as one in which there were days in which I, as one of millions, turned on the radio half a dozen times to hear any new scrap of news. We prayed that the Czechs would not give in because we knew what would follow. And it did. World War II followed. In the spring of the next year a tragic documentary film of these Czech events was played in New York. The man who had made it was Hans Burger. The film was called Crisis. I became friends with Burger and will tell about him later in my narrative.

However, Hitler, having promised that Germany had no interest in having any Czech under his authority, on March 15, 1939, five and a half months after Munich, sent his troops marching into Czechoslovakia as a whole. Thirteen days after this German, Italian, and Spanish fascist troops took over Madrid, and the Republican struggle of three years was at a bloody end. Fascist firing squads then took over and tens of thousands were

executed summarily in cities, towns, and villages throughout the areas formerly held by the Republicans. I want to discuss now the growth of anti-Semitic movements in the United States. Maybe we can pause for a moment. [tape recorder turned off]

Now, I want to talk about the rise of the anti-Semitic movement in the United States in those years. From the time that fascism first took power in Germany, one of its main exports was anti-Semitism. This led to the growth of anti-Semitic movements in most countries in the world. Historically, anti-Semitism is one of the most potent political weapons ever invented. Since Jews have been dispersed over a great part of the world, it has been a ready tool for reactionary political leaders in many countries. It has the great value of blinding persons to the reality around them. The Jew becomes the source of all problems and calamities. The United States was not free of anti-Semitism in various forms before Hitler came to power. But there's a vast difference between anti-Semitic attitudes that may be held by certain individuals and anti-Semitism as a political policy, as an organized banner. In the United States dozens and dozens of anti-Semitic groups, anti-Semitic and profascist, sprang up after Hitler came to power. In a pamphlet published by the League of American Writers which had

a-- There was a partial list of anti-Semitic publishers and individuals in America, and this partial list had 135 names on it. Weekly newspapers came into being. Tens of thousands of anti-Semitic leaflets were distributed every month. Public rallies were held. The leading groups were the German-American Bund, Gerald L.K. Smith's group, one led by William Dudley Pelley called the Christian American Crusade, and the movement headed by a Catholic priest, Father [Charles Edward] Coughlin.
[tape recorder turned off]

For instance, in a New York State gubernatorial campaign around the year 1938, I believe, the following leaflet was distributed widely among railroad workers by their foremen: "Don't vote for [Herbert Henry] Lehman. The Communists are voting for him because he is a Jew." I'm now reading from something I myself wrote that I will identify later:

We see the basic methodology of anti-Semitism expertly applied. The railroad workers are among the lowest paid in average of all industrial groups in America since they suffer from a short working year. At the same time it is impossible for them to apply for relief since they are classed as workers at jobs. Obviously their economic situation is serious, and acute discontent is widespread among them.

Oh, no, I'm sorry, that isn't the quote I wanted, dammit.

Now I have it. All right:

This is the invariable purpose of anti-Semitic campaigns: to divide the mass

of people; to divert the wrath of discontented sections of the population from the true causes of their misery; to blur in all instances the nature and anatomy of economic crises; and to mobilize the population in support of the program of the reactionaries who are conducting the anti-Semitic campaign in the first place.

Father Coughlin was the most dangerous of all of the anti-Semitic agitators. He had a Sunday night radio program which had 40 million listeners. And he was a most powerfully affecting orator. He published a magazine called Social Justice in which the anti-Semitism was much more blatant and vicious than he dared express himself on radio, and increasingly the sale of his magazine on the streets of New York and other cities began to take on the quality of the Nazi Brownshirts in Germany selling their written materials before the taking of power. There would be a little group of men around the salesman making anti-Semitic remarks at any person who passed whom they deemed to be Jewish. They were street bullies ready for physical violence.

Out of great concern about this development, both for political and personal reasons, I did some special research on the subject of anti-Semitism, and I was part of a small seminar led by a Jewish Communist scholar on the subject. In 1939 the League of American Writers published a pamphlet--or, I'd say, a brochure, not a pamphlet--a brochure of 125 pages called We Hold These Truths. It included statements

on anti-Semitism by fifty-four leading American writers, statesmen, educators, clergymen, and trade unionists, and the proceeds from the sale of the brochure were donated to exiled antifascist writers. Among those making statements whose names would be meaningful today were Theodore Dreiser, Ruth Benedict, Van Wyck Brooks, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Justice Robert H. Jackson, Dorothy Thompson, Tom Mooney, and many more. There was an introduction of some twelve pages to the brochure which was written anonymously by me.

GARDNER: Why did you do it anonymously?

MALTZ: Oh, because . . . [sound interference--tape recorder turned off] I wrote it anonymously because it was requested that I do so, and the request was sound since this was going to be a brochure to which many people contributed, and these many people had not selected me to be their spokesman in analyzing the total phenomenon of anti-Semitism. And so it was just thought proper that it should be just an introduction as though written by the league. I think that was right.

A little later, or about this time, I had occasion to drive down to Philadelphia with my friend George Sklar for production of some play, perhaps a play of ours, in Philadelphia and while there heard that anti-Semitic leaflets had been showered on the city from an airplane only the day before. This was a last straw for me, emotionally,

in propelling me toward an activity that could combat this sort of thing more efficiently than anything that I personally had done up until now.

I no longer recall how exactly those of us who founded the magazine called Equality got together, but I do know that it happened very quickly. One of the other founders with myself was a scholar I knew by the name of Albert Deutsch. He was a historian who had given me my first instruction on how to use a library for historical research. During the forties he became a columnist on the New York Post on matters of medicine and public health issues and became very widely read and very popular. A second man, who I believe I had previously met, was Nathan Ausubel, who had been a volunteer soldier in the Jewish Legion in General Allenby's army that entered Jerusalem in 1917. He was a man of letters and subsequently edited three volumes of Jewish poetry, folklore, and humor. There was Harold Coy, a free-lance journalist and a southern WASP, as I believe, and Leo Schwartz, a scholar in Jewish culture. I know that founding the magazine took a great deal of my time and that I went with others to see people to raise money and that when we came to our first issue, I wrote quite a number of things anonymously for it: the prospectus to get support and raise money, and to do all of those things that are involved in starting a

magazine. On our masthead for the first issue, which came out in May 1939, we listed an editorial council that included, among others, Professor Franz Boas (the anthropologist), Bennett Cerf (the publisher), Dashiell Hammett, Moss Hart, Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, and Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein. (I pause to say that Prince Loewenstein was an antifascist Catholic German in exile in the United States who worked earnestly and diligently for all antifascist causes during that time. I came to have a good deal of respect for him.)

I wrote three of the editorials of the first issue, anonymously of course. They were "To All People of Goodwill" and "Peace or War" and "Equality Is Not Divisible." We did a good thing in distributing our first issue. The first printing was 5,000 copies, as I recall, and we hired unemployed seamen and longshoremen to stand next to every seller of a Coughlin magazine in the central area of Manhattan and sell them alongside of that individual, with some friends around if protection was necessary. As a result, the first printing was sold out immediately, and our first issue ended up with a total sale of 20,000 copies.

GARDNER: Terrific.

MALTZ: Yes, it was an important achievement because people were able to rally around it and say Coughlin does not own the streets.

I will mention that the issues of Equality were collected and published due to the efforts of Professor Jack Salzman of Hofstra University and were issued by the Greenwood Reprint Corporation in 1970. [phone rings-- tape recorder turned off]

I'm now reading from the introduction by Professor Salzman to the bound publication of the copies of Equality:

In October 1939 Equality published its most important and influential piece: "The Christian Front and the Catholic Church: an Open Letter to Archbishop Spellman."

(The latter was the archbishop of New York City.)

The open letter asserted that the Christian Front movement in New York, following the leadership of Father Coughlin, served a double function.

And now he quotes Equality:

"It is first a membership organization formed along semimilitary lines limited to men over eighteen years of age; and second, a coordinated center for a united front of various anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi groups in this city."

Salzman continued:

Spellman never bothered to reply to the open letter. On January 14, 1940, seventeen members of the Christian Front were placed under federal arrest in New York for plotting to overthrow the government. Father Coughlin disavowed any association with the group and expressed the hope that J. Edgar Hoover would substantiate every contention made. It was the open letter that most clearly exposed the corruption of the Christian Front and Coughlinism. Not only did the Nation,

the New York Post, and several left-wing organizations join in the attack against Coughlin but so too did the Churchman and Commonweal.

I'd like to pause to insert my own comment here that one of the factors in every aspect of human life, not only political, but every aspect, is that if an individual or a group speaks up, it brings others to rally around and speak up as well. Certainly the Nation is and has always been a fine magazine, and yet here we find that this little magazine that we established, and in which we hammered what we had to say about Coughlinism, brought the Nation and the New York Post and the Protestant Churchman and the Catholic Commonweal to come forward in ways they had not previously. Going on, Salzman says:

In 1941 Cardinal Mooney* ordered Coughlin to cease his broadcasts and to end publication of Social Justice . . . The extent to which Equality can be credited with the demise of the Coughlin terror obviously cannot be accurately gauged, but that it was an important instrument in silencing the radio priest is beyond doubt. And if for this reason alone, it was an invaluable publication.

GARDNER: How long did publication continue?

MALTZ: Publication of Equality continued-- Its last issue was, I think, October/November of 1939--wait a minute . . . was it '39 or '40? 1940. Yes, October/November 1940.

* Edward Mooney was appointed cardinal in 1946--Ed.

But then it kind of merged into being another magazine; but as such it ended in 1940.

GARDNER: Did you retain the editorship throughout?

MALTZ: Yes, I was an editor throughout. And I gave a great deal of time to it. It's another example of why I, with my particular emotional chemistry, let's say, spent so much time on organizational work rather than on writing in those years. Nobody told me to do this; it was my own concern.

GARDNER: Were you involved in the fund raising as well?

MALTZ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

GARDNER: How did the magazine do. Did it. . . ?

MALTZ: Well, you know, none of us who worked on it-- There were a couple of people who were paid who were full-time office workers, but none of us, of the people like myself, got money from it; we just gave money to it.

GARDNER: Did it break even? Or did it lose money over the period that you were involved?

MALTZ: No. I think it broke even. I no longer remember its finances. Maybe it didn't break even. We got some ads. Maybe we just kept on raising money, but we got it. Well, of course I don't remember that we ended with any debts to anybody particularly.

GARDNER: Who absorbed it afterwards? You said it became. . . ?

MALTZ: I know that the current magazine which I presently read called Jewish Currents somehow was tied to it, but not directly; I think there was another magazine in between. I'm not sure. It's lost in time. Oh, in the course of it--I say, in the course of publishing Equality we got quite a number of people to write for it. For instance, in our first issue Dr. Fosdick, who was a very well-known Protestant pastor in New York, Lewis Lawes, who was warden of Sing Sing, Dorothy Thompson, were in our first issue. If I pick at random an issue of August 1939, well, none of the names would be known today, although they were at that time. That's an important difference. For instance, Donald Ogden Stewart was a real name, and I don't think he is very well known today by, let's say the current generation.

GARDNER: But by book collectors?

MALTZ: Or here in Equality, in October 1939: Albert Gerard, leading professor of comparative literature at Stanford University, Meyer Levin, the novelist; artists who contributed: William Gropper, Birnbaum, and so on.

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GARDNER: You are continuing to thumb through Equality.

MALTZ: Yes, I'm interested to see that in an issue of January 1940, there's an article "Justice for the Foreign-born" by Ernest Hemingway and W. A. Neilson; "End Lynching" by Walter White, who was head of the NAACP; "Lindbergh's Tailspin" by Emil Lengyel, who was a very well-known foreign correspondent; and an editorial, "The Strange Friends of Congressman Dies: An Exposure," and so on. Well, I think now I'll move on from Equality.

During 1939 I did a number of other items of fugitive, anonymous writing--fugitive or anonymous writing. One was a book review of Ruth McKenney's fine book Industrial Valley for the New Masses, and I will mention her. Ruth McKenney and her husband, whose name was Richard Bransten and who had the pen name of Bruce Minton as an editor of the New Masses, were friends of mine. Her "My Sister Eileen" stories in the New Yorker had been very popular and were made into a very successful Broadway comedy. And she was an interesting personality because on the one hand [she was] writing the light and amusing material she did; on the other hand, she combined it with open membership in the Communist party. And I will mention something that transpired later in the forties with them.

I observe that I wrote something for the Drama Festival Bulletin of Union College, the Mohawk Drama Festival, called "The New Trend in the American Theater." I remember going up to Union College and making a speech to some outdoor gathering where others also made speeches, but now I no longer remember why or how I got there.

[laughter] And I published a story in the New Masses called "A Gentleman and His Son," which got one reprint in England and then expired as a story.

In the summer of 1939 I spent three weeks in Boulder, at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado, at something called the Writing Conference in the Rocky Mountains. Most assuredly I did it, interrupting the rewrite of my first novel, because of the fee paid, and I don't recall now whether it was \$300 or \$500. But I know that I went there sitting up in a train all night in order to save the cost of a berth and once there, of course, did my best to be of value to the students. An English poet was the head of the conference. His name was Edward Davidson, a man of great charm and one who said something that I will never forget. One night after having listened to him on quite a number of nights in which he talked marvelously about a host of different subjects, I asked him why he didn't write some of these things in a book. And he laughed and said candidly, "Well, you know,

I've talked my life away." And I've never forgotten it because I think this is true of a certain number of talented people.

A man who was teaching there at the same time was Eric Knight, whom I have already mentioned in discussing The Flying Yorkshireman. We became good friends, and his death several years later was very painful to me. I think I may not have mentioned that he wrote a best-selling novel during the war called This Above All about England under the bombing. He went as a journalist in a plane carrying other journalists to the Teheran Conference, and the plane went down over a South American country . . . and his talent was cut off.

A second member of the faculty was Norman Corwin, for whom I had enormous admiration because of his stunning work as a radio poet-dramatist, and we have remained friends. Still another was Carl Van Doren, who came only for about a week, as I recall, but with whom I had the opportunity of conversation during an all-day automobile ride. Having known his younger brother as a student, it was of interest to me to see in the older brother the same calm, thoughtful, and friendly personality that Mark Van Doren had. I think they were both remarkable human beings.

A final member of the faculty whom I will mention was a professor of English from Union College, Burges Johnson. I often think of him as representative of many thousands

like him whose name and work are likely to be forgotten, and yet who was really an outstanding human being and teacher. Burges Johnson was a witty man who published absolutely delightful poetry from time to time, usually on such occasions as his wife's birthday, and who had published rather a number of books, and who was, I'm sure, an absolute delight in the classroom. I remained friends with him and his wife all down the years until his death in the late fifties. He would send me his holiday poems and his poems for his wife. I don't know any way in which the world will ever be any different in respect to men like him. I don't see how it can be, and I suppose that it's just for those of us who meet individuals like that to cherish him. And that's the end of it. I don't think I've been very coherent about this, but I'm going to be doing things on editing, I'm sure.

Before and after this three-week session, which was a very intense one in which one lectured to classes every day for several hours, read a good deal, read material written by everyone in the class (and this included full-length plays and short plays and so on) and, in addition, prepared and delivered a speech to the entire university. . . . I went back to Provincetown, Massachusetts, from which I had started, sitting up again on the way back, of course, to return with as much money as possible and went on with

the final weeks of revision of my novel. [tape recorder turned off]

I come now to the immense event of 1939 which was the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact on August 23, 1939. I first heard of it when I was in the middle of a tennis game at Provincetown, and the man I was playing with was someone who had been helpful to the Theatre Union. He was a member of the Socialist party, a very nice and sincere man.

GARDNER: The name?

MALTZ: I forget his name. But I will never forget what happened when we were told by someone who came over to the tennis court. He flung his tennis racket down on the court and shouted in a fury, "This is a sellout!" I was just as unprepared for the pact as he was and I was as bewildered by it as he was, but with my enormous amount of attachment to the Soviet Union as a political entity, I was not prepared to say that it was a sellout. In the course of the next days and weeks I came to have a position that it was not a sellout at all, and I can best express what I came to feel by reading from Professor Fleming's The Cold War and Its Origins (this is from volume one, page 84):

There remains the question whether the appeasement governments deliberately planned to turn Hitler toward the East and into a war with Russia.

There was no question that the Nazis had done their best to convince the world that they were out to smash Bolshevism and conquer the Soviet Union. Hitler's speech saying that if he had the Urals all Germans would be swimming in plenty was only an outstanding example of this propaganda . . . If London and Paris had not consciously sought to speed Hitler's march to the Urals, they had exerted themselves mightily to place within his grasp the necessary power for an attack upon the Soviet Union. Until the Czech bastion was swept away he could not effectively take over the Balkans, which he required to give him the necessary food and raw materials for a really great war machine, in addition to putting him on the borders of the Soviet Union. After Munich the British and French had lost all power to prevent Nazi Germany from becoming a colossus capable of attacking the Soviet Union or of turning upon them. To say that this certain and inevitable result of the long and persistent appeasement of Nazi Germany never occurred to the British and French Governments is to vastly underrate their astuteness and perspicacity.

And now I want to quote again from page 96 of his book:

In the Western world the Nazi-Soviet Pact caused widespread indignation . . . The Soviets were accused of executing the greatest double-cross in history. People everywhere said that this proved how treacherous they were and how wise the Allies had been in being slow to trust them. Anti-Communists all over the world charged that this treaty was the cause of the Second World War. Others, a little more discriminating, said that it had touched off the war, made it certain. The pact, it was said, gave Hitler the green light. In this form the charge was to be repeated perpetually for many years, especially when Soviet-American relations became acute after the Second World War.

Actually, the Nazi determination to settle accounts with Poland had for months been as plain as anything could be . . . The decision to obliterate Poland was therefore fixed before the pact with Russia was signed. Without the pact the Nazi

Panzer divisions would have rolled up to the borders of the Soviet Union, occupying the White Russian and Ukranian half of Poland to which the Soviet Union had a far better right. This fact alone should dispose of the contention that if the Soviet Union could not come to terms with Britain and France it should have at least stood neutral like the American Congress. Moscow, it is said, did not need to make a deal with Hitler and give him the green light, but in reality the Soviet Government did not have this choice. By standing aloof it would have lost not only Eastern Poland but the Baltic states as well. By rejecting Hitler's promises, and the threats that always went with them, the Soviets would have placed themselves in the daily and imminent danger of fighting the German-Russian war for which they believed the West had tried to bring about.

This seems to me a sober presentation of the actual facts. I find that now, after the passage of a great many years and no longer having the allegiances that I did at that time to either the Communist party or the Soviet Union, I nevertheless feel that the Soviet Union had every right to sign the nonaggression pact that it did, and that in fact the British and French had been signing nonaggression pacts with Hitler from 1935 on. So their screams were only those of people whose plans had fallen to the ground.

Now, from that date until June 22, 1941, when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union--a period of twenty-two months--the Communists of the United States learned what it was to be against the mainstream in a way that they had not experienced since the days of the [Alexander Mitchell] Palmer raids after World War I. (At least most of the

party personnel had not had the experience.) Now, perhaps for a certain type of emotionally combative person being against the mainstream and finding hostility on all sides is a situation that is enjoyable. But I think for most individuals, like myself, there's no pleasure in it, but I felt and others felt that we had to take that stand however unpopular it made us. Psychologically it was, to a certain degree, a preparation for the McCarthy years. The twenty-two months that-- No, let's pause for a moment while I get a date. [tape recorder turned off] The twenty-two months were a period of enormous complexity. During that period I adhered to the Communist party position. This meant that my attitudes, like that of other Communists, were based upon a series of propositions: (a) That the most urgent need of mankind was the preservation of the first and only socialist state. Defend the Soviet Union was a cardinal slogan of the Communist parties throughout the world. Now, this attitude involved an abiding trust in the Soviet Union, a belief that what it did was right not only for its own security but for the future of all peoples. It also involved the belief that in the leadership of the Communist party of the Soviet Union there was a deep well of wisdom based on a scientific socialist analysis of events. I look back at the latter proposition now and I smile at

my innocence. In today's world in which we see China pitted against Russia, China against Vietnam, Vietnam against Cambodia, Russia against Yugoslavia, and so on--to speak of scientific socialism is to talk nonsense. However, I believed it at the time and many others did.

(b) My attitudes also involved profound bitterness toward, and hatred of, the governments of England and France who had cooperated in the murder of the Spanish Republic, the incorporation of Austria, the rape of Czechoslovakia and so on. Finally, finally, they had given Poland a paper promise to come to its aid. And then when Poland was invaded by Germany, France did not take the obvious move of driving into the Rhineland. So far as I was concerned, the treachery of those leaders had been demonstrated once more. This, then, seemed to me to be a quarrel between imperialist antagonists--one side more savage than the other, but both sides imperialist. (c) Although now I think the Soviet aggression against Finland was a blunder, I didn't think so then and it was far from being a simple matter. However, if I had ever thought that it was a serious error, practically and in principle, I would not then have ceased supporting the Soviet Union. And this is no different from those, let's say, who supported Roosevelt in the election of 1940 in spite of the fact that they perhaps had detested his position about Spain during the

years 1936 to 1939. (d) We watched with enormous dismay and anguish as Hitler Germany successively overran Greece, Yugoslavia, Norway, and Denmark; and yet what was to be done? Who was to stop it? And then finally came the attack in the spring of 1940 on Holland, Belgium, and France. Then followed the fall of France and the British evacuation of its expeditionary force at Dunkirk. And after that came the air battle for Britain which Hitler apparently hoped would be a prelude to a land conquest of Britain. It's my belief now that with this battle the character of the British government, which had already changed-- Let me phrase it different . . . that with this battle a genuine anti-Nazi struggle began on the part of England. Previous to this, the Chamberlain government had fallen, Churchill had come into power. And I think we were no longer faced by the phony war that had existed between France, Britain, and Germany before the invasion. But now there was a genuine struggle on the part of England against Germany, the sort of struggle that the Soviet Union had pleaded for in its policy of collective security.

However, I didn't see at that time, and the Communist parties of the world did not see at that time, that the character of the war had changed. This was a terrible error, and it was due to the fact that in foreign policy

the Communist parties were not independent politically. They waited for political signs from Moscow so that their foreign policies could be coordinated with that of the Soviet Union. As a result, the Communist party of the United States, for instance, took a stand during the battle for Britain, at a time when Roosevelt was ferrying planes to Britain, of opposition to this and to lend-lease, and its slogan was The Yanks Are Not Coming. As a result, at times the position of the Communist party came close to that of the isolationists in the America First group, who were political reactionaries. Now, the Communist party switched its position within twenty-four hours after the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. This certainly did not win it any respect. It appeared to make of it a party without any principle beyond support of the Soviet Union. Now, this was true of its foreign policy, but it was not true of it as a whole. I was very unhappy and very troubled at the time over this event, but I continued to feel that the Marxist parties were the only path to human brotherhood, and I asked myself what persons or parties have never made grave mistakes. And so the events of that time did not cause me to lose my allegiance.

As a footnote to the period of 1939, I was asked by V. J. Jerome, whom I have mentioned before as a Communist functionary in the cultural field, to write a statement. . . .

Can we hold up a second? [tape recorder turned off]

I was asked to write a statement in collaboration with Dashiell Hammett on the efforts that were then going on to suppress the Communist party and to imprison its general secretary, Earl Browder, on a technical charge of passport violation. I was willing to do this, and I believe it was the first time I ever had any private conversation with Hammett, although I can't be sure of this; of course, we might have had other conversations that I have forgotten. However, for about three weeks I came once a week to his home somewhere downtown off Fifth Avenue and we discussed some materials that I had prepared.

(I could mention in passing that our appointments were usually for noon or one o'clock, and when I would come, invariably I was not met by Hammett but by a sort of butler, I guess a butler who worked for him . . . not a butler but a man who worked for him, and who told me that Mr. Hammett would be right down. But Hammett was never right down, and when he appeared in a dressing gown over his pajamas, it was obvious to me that he had just been awakened and that he was probably suffering from a hangover.) I can't say that his contributions to what finally appeared were very great, but I did meet with him on each occasion and get his approval and occasional suggestions. It was a statement in defense of the Bill of

Rights and I think there was considerable soundness to it. But although sent out to the press in general with the names of sixty or seventy intellectuals attached to it, so far as I know it was published only in the Daily Worker. However, I think that's all. And I think we're finished for the day.

TAPE NUMBER: XIII, SIDE ONE

NOVEMBER 8, 1978

MALTZ: Nineteen forty was a year of considerable publication for me. I had a short story, "Sunday Morning on Twentieth Street," in the spring issue of Southern Review. In June my first novel, The Underground Stream, was published and I'll read from some of the press reviews.

[tape recorder turned off] This was the review in the New York Times, July 7, 1940, by Harold Strauss: "He has brought the labor novel back to the heroic pattern, and he has created a hero of massive proportions, a man who is not a poor creature of his immediate environment but one strong enough to avow and even to pursue an ideal of human dignity and universal justice." And in the New York Herald-Tribune, Alfred Kazin: "The simplest characterization of Albert Maltz, and perhaps the truest, would be that he is a left-wing writer with real talent. What Maltz has tried to do in this novel is not merely to present communist heroism, but to describe and analyze the life of two antagonistic social groups. It is true that, while Maltz's workers are superb and superbly presented, his capitalists and aspirant capitalists are more confusing than devilish. But Maltz's effort to analyze, to characterize scrupulously, is obvious. And while it leads him to some fairly clumsy writing and occasionally embarrassing

simplicity, the intelligence of his effort is refreshing. There are many qualities lacking in The Underground Stream, qualities that have been popular with proletarian Homers, but qualities that one would dearly love to see in the American novel. Yet what Maltz has to say is important, and he says it strikingly. There are other virtues in the novel, other ambitions, greater excellences. These may be enough at the moment. These are warm and arresting now." In the daily New York Herald-Tribune, Lewis Gannett: "Albert Maltz's first full-length novel, The Underground Stream, might, with a few minor changes, have been about an earlier Christian martyr. It is head and shoulders above the proletarian novels of recent years both in originality of conception and dramatic power. It is terse, earthy, exciting. It makes, to be sure, initial assumptions that most of us are unwilling to accept. It identifies the integrity and self-respect toward which Princey works with acceptance of Communist party discipline without ever discussing the goals toward which that discipline is directed. But the larger theme--man does not live by politics alone but yearns for identification with something larger than himself--is the stuff of which great modern novels are made. Drop the specific terminology and Mr. Maltz might be writing about religion or patriotism, which is a modern form of religion." Daily New York Times,

Ralph Thompson: "I think that the important thing to say about it is the one thing that the publishers forgot to say on the jacket--that it has an American Communist for a hero. Some reviewers, I note, have followed suit and treated it and admired it as a labor novel. So it unquestionably is. But it is not so much a labor novel as a party novel. In fact, it is almost a hymn in praise of the party--its politics, its methods, its leaders, its rank and file. The Underground Stream need hardly be discussed apart from this tendency. It has dramatic moments, melodramatic moments, clumsy moments, some excellent description and some humor. The point is the party, and the test is the ideal." Let's stop for a moment. [tape recorder turned off]

I think there's no doubt that if The Underground Stream had been published before the Nazi-Soviet pact, those reviews which just attacked it on political grounds would not have done so--or most would not have--and its reception would have been a warmer one. It probably would have sold better. As it was, it sold out its first edition of 4,000 copies and was not reprinted. After the war it was reprinted, however, in some sixteen languages and earned some foreign royalties over the next fifteen years. It has never gone into paperback in the United States.

GARDNER: What's your own feeling toward the novel, in

the context of your writing?

MALTZ: I really can't tell you, because I haven't reread the novel in many years. And in these past years I've sometimes had occasion to reread something of my own because it was going to be republished and some editing was wanted or something like that--some specific reason. And I find that sometimes I feel good about the work, and sometimes my opinion of it goes way down, so that I can't tell you what I would feel about The Underground Stream now. There will come a time presently, I think, where I'll want to read everything I've written and try to assess the way I feel about it. I don't know about that one.

GARDNER: What about the problems of the novel? This was really your first novel. You've done plays that required similar structure.

MALTZ: Yes. Well, working on a novel for me involved a great deal of thought, many pauses in which I would look at the writings of other novelists just to learn simple techniques. For instance, questions of tense are very interesting. I learned, and then was able to apply, a methodology that is common in many books but which I had never noticed because I hadn't had occasion to notice--namely, use of the past tense in this way: John had first seen Mary when they were in Grand Central Station

at adjacent ticket windows. It so happens that she had dropped something out of her purse and he had picked it up for her, and this had led to a bit of conversation. It was obvious that each found the other very interesting, and they went about. . . . I've now slipped from had to the past tense. I forget all the grammar names. I use grammar, but I don't know the names of it anymore: I don't know what "he had seen"--what is that?

GARDNER: Pluperfect.

MALTZ: Yes, pluperfect. All right. And then into the simple past. Well, things like that were things that I had to learn and apply, and sometimes they took some time. I don't know whether this is true of other writers, it was true of me. But then there were questions of style. I know that I spent time studying certain writers whose style I admired at the time I was writing The Underground Stream: one of them was [André] Malraux, Man's Fate; a second was Andreyev, the Russian writer, author of The Ten Who Were Hanged--what was it? This is absurd. . . .

GARDNER: I think that's what it is.

MALTZ: Just turn this off for a minute. [tape recorder turned off] The Seven Who Were Hanged and, as I recall, some of Galsworthy. This was in the period of my first novel. I found what I would call simple, clean writing, something that I wanted to try and achieve. While I could

admire the lush prose of a Thomas Wolfe--did and do--it was not something I had inside of me to write. I do know that in that novel and I think in all of my novels, I tended to use short time spans in what was a combination of dramatic and novelistic technique because the dramatic form came very naturally to me. But, in addition, I felt that there was an automatic tension and suspense that was set up by the tight time factor that one finds in a book like Man's Fate, and also in The Seven Who Were Hanged, which I liked.

GARDNER: What about characterizations? In working with the theater it's a completely different problem because, first of all, you have dialogue; second of all, you have actors, live actors; in the novel you are left only with characters.

MALTZ: Yes. One of the reasons I turned to the novel from theater--not the only reason--was that I felt I wanted to try and achieve some depths of characterization that I couldn't achieve on the stage in plays, [because] there wasn't time for them. I wanted to be able to go into a character's thoughts and into his past in a way that the novel permits. [tape recorder turned off] The novel is a much freer form than the theater, especially the Ibsen theater to which I came. It permits all of the devices of theater in terms of dialogue, but it also permits an author to comment; it permits train of thought; it permits

flashback scenes into the past; it permits memories, fantasy, dreams in a way that's not possible in theater. And the fact is I found fiction a more agreeable form in which to work than the theater, or else I would have gone back to the theater. I don't know, in fact, whether--yes, I'll change that. I do know. . . . I feel that I did better work in fiction than I did in drama, and I'm only sorry that the way my life has gone I had to spend so much time at film writing and was not able to concentrate purely on fiction.

GARDNER: Okay. Oh, go ahead.

MALTZ: I'm sorry. Please.

GARDNER: I was just going to say, were you--well, go ahead. . . . When did you go to Hollywood then?

MALTZ: Well, I'm going to come to that. I find that sequences by years are the easiest for me to recall. Now, in 1940 I wrote several reviews in Equality magazine. One was of the novel Native Son by Richard Wright, and I ended that review by saying: "It's a fine and noble book. Read it and be proud of the author." The second was a review of the film Gone with the Wind, and I titled my review, "Slandering the Negro: Four Million Dollars' Worth of Wind." I did anonymous writing for Equality, and I'll mention it for what value it has for a record like this: in 1940, in February, an editorial, "Father Coughlin

Streamlines for War"; in March, "Grapes of Wrath Folk," "Take Your Choice" and "The Dies Committee and Anti-Semitism"; in April, "Labor and Democratic Rights"; and in May, "The Fog Comes in on Little Cat Feet."

I wrote an anonymous leaflet for Mother's Day, May 14, for distribution by the Queens-Long Island branch of the Communist party. And I mention this because I am glad at this moment to see the slogans after these many years which were: Boycott Germany and Italy; Stop Munition Shipments to Japan; Stop the Fascist Warmakers; Let America Join with All Peace-Loving Nations to Bar Further Aggression. I mention this because it's illustrative of the complexities of the politics of that period. May 14, 1940, is a period in which Roosevelt was already sending lend-lease shipments to England, which I was not supporting; on the other hand, he was selling munitions to Japan, which I was against, and those munitions were used, in effect, on Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. In addition, with the Communist party somewhat uncertain--certainly the Soviet Communist party--on how it handled its antifascism in that period, I had the slogan Boycott Germany and Italy, so that my support of the pact had not made me personally lessen my hatred of fascism. I also wrote anonymously a statement, "The Writers Don't Want War," for the League of American Writers, which was signed by 300 writers. This must have been written

before Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, because I notice among the signers Irwin Shaw, and I know that in a personal encounter with him he expressed his differences with me after that time. But it's interesting that at that period among the signers were Richard Wright, Muriel Rukeyser, Ruth McKenney, Rockwell Kent, Robert Coates, Harold Clurman, Nelson Algren. My scrapbook tells me that at the fourth [congress] of the League of American Writers that year I was elected one of the vice-presidents, Richard Wright was another, Dashiell Hammett became president. And I see by the board of directors that a split had occurred and that men like Malcolm Cowley and Archibald MacLeish and Hemingway had cut themselves off from the league.

GARDNER: For what reasons?

MALTZ: Well, because they were supporting Roosevelt in that period and were for aid to England.

In June there came an invitation from some--I guess really from members of the Communist party in Hollywood for either George Sklar or myself to come out and do a revision of our play Peace on Earth; to update it to the immediate scene and have a production in Los Angeles. I asked George Sklar the other day just how it came about, and he remembered that they sent one train ticket with a berth. We decided that we would both go, and we went out sitting up four nights and three days as a way of getting in under the same amount of money.

GARDNER: Who was it that extended the invitation?

MALTZ: Well, it came from a group which would have involved, I know, Herbert Biberman and--gosh, I don't know what specific others. I know Jerry Chodorov. . . . And out here we discussed what they had in mind, and we decided what we could do, and I did a first version rapidly. And then I had to go to Boulder, Colorado, for another summer session, and George stayed on and stayed right through changes and rehearsals, which were apparently very painful for him. The play that resulted I don't suppose was very good, and it ran about three or four weeks and then closed.

On the faculty at Boulder were some interesting men: Robert Penn Warren, who was just a very nice gentleman, as well as being a fine writer; and Harry Hansen, the book reviewer; and Frederick Lewis Allen, a very interesting author whose works Only Yesterday and another one with a similar title were important histories of the period.

After that I returned to our apartment in Queens. About this period a financial squeeze started between the higher expenditures caused by the fact that we had a child and the fact that my novel hadn't earned anything over the \$500 advance.

GARDNER: Five hundred?

MALTZ: Yes. At that time an advance of \$500 was a going advance for a first novel. As a matter of fact (I'll look

it up) for my second novel I think the advance was about \$1,500 down and \$500 when I turned in the manuscript. The advances that we read of today are very different. It's a very different book scene. For instance, a leading best-selling author like Hemingway never earned from his books probably a fifth of what is earned by best-selling authors today. And my volume of short stories had also not earned anything, and so I went into a period in which I intermittently tried, in addition to my teaching and my other writing, to write stories for the Saturday Evening Post, which at that time was paying \$750 and \$1,000 for a story; whereas the most I would be getting for a short story would be \$100 to \$300. None of my stories sold to the Post, but several sold to very low-paying papers and magazines, and I gave that up. I have noted that my earnings from purely literary work from 1932, when I did have a film sale, part of a film sale, through 1940 averaged out at \$2,300 a year, or less than \$200 a month. Now, that was not too bad for a beginning writer in those days.

GARDNER: Or for the era, when things were probably cheaper.

MALTZ: But it was not enough to live on if you had a child and wanted to live above poverty level. My wife in that period did do some work, but not after we had the child.

GARDNER: Well, in addition, didn't you have the earnings of your teaching and so on?

MALTZ: Yes, I had earnings from teaching, yes. Now, reprints--that's why I could get along: reprints of my work continued, and I'm going to continue to mention this because we'll see the contrast when we come to the blacklist years. "Man on a Road" and "Happiest Man on Earth" went into literary anthologies for college students. "Incident on a Street Corner" went into Short Stories from the New Yorker, and payments for reprints varied from \$25 to \$50 each. And nowadays they would be \$250 or \$300 or more. In the fall the financial squeeze deepened because young people, who had been on WPA, started to get factory work, and my classes became smaller. In 1941 I published "Afternoon in the Jungle" in the New Yorker, and this has been reprinted often in many countries.

I also published something which I hoped was going to foreshadow a novel that I wanted to write, and that was a story called "The Piece of Paper" in a magazine called Direction, which had a short life. The title "The Piece of Paper" referred to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. During this period of 1940 and 1941 I had been reading in black history, which of course at that time we called Negro history. My reading had started with a book that was startling in its information: it was Negro Slave Revolts in the United States by Herbert Aptheker, published by Columbia University Press. This scholar, who later

became a Communist party functionary, had uncovered an entire vein of ore, let's say, of Negro slave history which at once changed one's picture of the centuries of slavery. Because he established that there were no less than 400 organized revolts against slavery by Negroes and that therefore they had not been the, quote, "happy slaves" that the southerners, the southern slave owners, said they were. There was also a best-selling book by Henrietta Buckmaster called Let My People Go about slavery and the underground railroad, the events of the period, which was a fine work of scholarship. And there were the books of Du Bois to which I was introduced. The result was that I conceived of a three-volume project of novels, with each novel able to stand on its own feet, and my following all the characters through from beginning to end. The first novel would encompass the period of slavery, the second the period of the Civil War, and the third of Reconstruction. I became very excited by it and began to read in all my spare time, to make research notes, and notes for the story, and I was on a very high level of excitement about it.

During the year 1941, short story reprints continued to grow and be in college anthologies of literature, and my story "The Happiest Man on Earth" was made into a short film by MGM. MGM said that it was embarking on a program

of doing short stories as short films so that the double feature in films could be changed and that they would have one feature and a short film based upon a short story of quality. But, in fact, it never followed with any others after mine.

GARDNER: Were you well paid for the movie rights?

MALTZ: Oh, I think I got \$1,000 for the movie rights, or \$900. In those years, for me, getting \$900 was great. That was unexpected and it was fine, but of course it was a small sum. Now, I have not discussed politics in this period because I covered this period, really, in earlier discussion.

GARDNER: Talking about the Nazi-Soviet pact and so on.

MALTZ: Yes, and that whole period. I note from my scrap-book that on January 8, '41, I spoke at a Westchester town meeting in a hall at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York. Now, I have no idea why I spoke. Maybe I was offered fifty dollars and spoke for that reason; it is more likely that I spoke just because someone asked me to. But I do recall that this talk had to do in considerable part with the role of black troops in the Civil War, which was one of the things that I was very excited about. I think I will mention in passing that due to manpower shortages the enlistment of freed slaves, or northern blacks, in the Union army--so that there were 400,000 of them--and the use of blacks in transport and supply and digging trenches and

so on were so significant that President Lincoln said that if they were on the other side, instead of on his side, he would have to give up the war. And, in fact, the central political discussion in the South for the last two years of the war was whether or not they should free their slaves if they would fight on the side of the South. And this was a terrible issue for the South because the southerners had maintained that blacks were not morally fit to be free. If they now said they would give them their freedom if they fought, they would acknowledge the bankruptcy of their previous moral stand. So that the South was split on this issue. But it was the intervention of General Lee, who said, "We will know how to take care of them after the war," which led to a final vote in favor of freeing slaves who would fight. But it was too late when the South did this.

Now, I had all of this material in my hands, was very excited about it, and I knew of the absolutely brilliant military record of the black troops in the northern army. They were tremendous as soldiers because they were fighting for what they desperately wanted. And I wanted to follow in my novel a slave who became one of those troops. After my talk a professor of Sarah Lawrence who was present wrote me a furious letter denouncing me (probably I have it somewhere, but I'm not sure), and I answered him with documentation, probably taking a full day to do so. But I

observe at this time how much time went into this one talk, and I don't think it was the way to spend my time. It would have been better spent working on the novel.

In January I see by my scrapbook that I also attended a meeting of authors and educators on the problems of anti-Semitism. Now, this is interesting because it reveals to what extent the issue of anti-Semitism was one of great concern to decent people at that time. The meeting was held under the auspices of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and among those present were Thornton Wilder, Archibald MacLeish, Henry Seidel Canby, Edna Ferber, and John Marquand. You just simply would not get a gathering of that distinction on the issue of anti-Semitism today because there isn't that kind of issue.

The financial squeeze that I have been mentioning became too great in the spring of 1941. My wife and I owed Bloomingdale's department store \$800, and I suppose that would be about \$4,000 today, or maybe more, and I used to say that they owned our son. My friends Michael Blankfort and George Sklar had gotten work in Hollywood, and we made the decision that I would try also. And as soon as teaching was over, I went out to Las Vegas, New Mexico, because my mother-in-law was ill and my wife had taken our son out there earlier. And then after a few days I went overnight by bus to Los Angeles. And I, for about ten days, slept

on a couch in the tiny cottage that the Sklars had. Although he was working, they had not yet accumulated enough money to move into anything better than the very simple little quarters that they had.

By luck I got a job very quickly. The film director Frank Tuttle had a piece of material--had a novel, actually, by Graham Greene called This Gun for Hire which had been owned by Paramount, and he had worked out a way in which the story might be done which was acceptable. He wanted a writer just at the time that I came into town and heard about me and knew my work, and I got the job at \$300 a week. Now, that was not the actual net that one received, because Hollywood salaries always involve a 10 percent deduction for an agent, and in my case it was 15 percent because I had an arrangement whereby my literary agent got 5 percent and there's 1 percent . . . [phone rings--tape recorder turned off] . . . and deducted from a Hollywood salary there's always 1 percent for motion picture relief, and it would have been about 1 percent for dues to the guild, the Writers Guild, and taxes, so that \$300 salary does not mean that. But, on the other hand, compared to the kind of money that I had been earning, it was wonderful; it was just what I hoped to achieve. There's an amusing story that's worth telling in passing about this.

I worked for the first several months up at the home of director Frank Tuttle, who lived in a very large house in the Hollywood Hills; not only a large house with large grounds, it had a swimming pool but also had a very large poolside place where there was a gym and where guests could dress and undress and so on. And it was there that a table was set up and I worked. Now, I had come from Los Angeles with one suit only . . .

GARDNER: To Los Angeles.

MALTZ: . . . to Los Angeles with one suit only, which was a very heavy green tweed suit which I distinctly remember buying in New York in a cut-rate haberdashery for twenty-five dollars the winter before. It was wonderful for the New York winters. It had a vest, it was very heavy tweed, it was water-repellent, and it was just great. But when I hit Los Angeles in June, the weather was warm, and Frank Tuttle was out on the side of his pool just in a pair of swim trunks taking the sun. And while I would take off my jacket (I had left my vest at home, of course), and I'd take off my tie, I was still sitting in this heavy pair of tweed trousers. And Frank would say, "Why do you wear such a warm suit?" And I would say, "Oh, I'm not warm." And it occurs to me that I could have borrowed money from George Sklar or Michael Blankfort for a new suit; why I didn't, I don't know. But I went through this comedy until money

accumulated and I was able to get some clothes and an apartment and a car.

On the twenty-second of that month, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and the political atmosphere began to change rapidly. With the Soviet Union at war with Germany, the U.S. establishment stopped considering the Soviet Union its enemy, and vice versa; the Communist party stopped considering the U.S. establishment an imperialist seducer of the masses. Now the Communist party wanted Roosevelt to send lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union as well as to England.

GARDNER: Did you immediately make contacts in the party out here when you came?

MALTZ: I did very shortly after I came here, and I'll come to that in a moment. On the bottom level in Hollywood, and this was representative of other areas in the country, Communists and fellow travelers were able to function together with liberals who had been opposed to the Nazi-Soviet pact because they all found themselves now on the same side. Here I think I might discuss briefly the functioning of the major studios in the 1940s, since the way they operated is very different from the way they do today, and I don't believe we're ever likely to return to the way it once was.

In the forties the major studios still owned chains of theaters. When I say chains of theaters, it meant not only

for the sale of tickets to those people who came to see their films, but for the popcorn sales which meant so much in terms of general income. At that time there was no TV on the scene to be a competitor, and some 90 million people a week went to the films. The Saturday night habit was a strong one all over the country. At that time studios turned out 400 to 500 films a year instead of perhaps 200 at most now, and frequently there were double bills in theaters. And since the companies got a profit by not only making the films but by exhibiting them, they were able to have on their payroll producers, directors, writers, actors and so on. It was the great profits of the film industry that brought about the huge salaries for the top people who worked in them.

For instance, if a writer at that time earned \$500 a week and spent twenty weeks on a film script, that was \$10,000 that he earned. But if at that time his film grossed \$3 million and returned a profit, let's say, of a million and a half to the studio, it is easy to see why the studio was willing to pay him \$500 a week, which was far more than, let's say, a physician was earning at that time. [tape recorder turned off] The same was true of actors and directors and producers.

As a result, studios competed with one another in order to get those writers, directors, producers, and actors

who would bring in the most at the box office, and it was out of this competition, and of of the general high profits of the industry, that the salaries of those who worked in it were as high as they were. Since there was not a similar competition among secretaries and others who worked in the industry, their salaries were no greater than the salaries they could have earned if they were secretaries in businesses of clothing manufacturers or paper concerns. Now, the level, what I'd [call] the artistic and intelligence level of the executive personnel at that time varied from the extreme vulgar to men of very genuine taste. (And I say men because women were all but excluded.) It was my very good fortune in my years in Hollywood in the forties, for the most part, to work with individuals of taste. But I know a lot of my friends who did not. I came to. . . .

GARDNER: You don't care to name names on that, I take it?

MALTZ: Well, I. . . .

GARDNER: People who stand out on either end of the spectrum?

MALTZ: I will. I'm going to mention Jerry Wald in a moment and a few other people of specific things I worked in, so I will probably do it that way.

I came to the film industry with a personal plan which I adhered to for the six and a half years from my arrival until the blacklist, and that plan was to do everything I

could to minimize the amount of film work I did in order to have as much time as possible for fiction. So that I intended to live modestly, and my wife was in accord with this: save all the money we could, and as soon as I had enough money to go to work on some fiction, to do so. And this is the way I did live. I'd like to make a passing comment about writers who go to work in films.

There is a general attitude amongst, let's say, intellectuals outside of the film industry, a general assumption that if a writer moves from New York or Chicago or some other area to look for work in films he has, quote, "sold out." The same people who do not look down at a businessman for making money sneer at writers who work for money. They have "gone Hollywood," and they somehow have betrayed a sacred trust. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: XIII, SIDE TWO

NOVEMBER 8, 1978

GARDNER: Before we resume our conversation we are going to copy something that was recorded while the tape was running out.

MALTZ: Now, in the first place there are various kinds of writers--and always have been. For instance, a writer may have had a play, a first play performed on Broadway, that was a comedy, let's say, and the writer never had any desire to do serious work: he wrote in the hope of making money. Well, why shouldn't such a writer go where money was paid for his talents? And sometimes, of course, there are a great many writers who talk about serious creative work but never do it. There are such people to be found in New York and San Francisco and so on, and they're not declared to have sold out because they just sit in basements and chew the fat but don't go out to Hollywood. There are very serious film writers, like Dudley Nichols, who was a newspaperman and who did some of the best work of his career in Hollywood, who nevertheless . . . [copy tape recorder turned off]

GARDNER: Okay, we're now resuming our human-to-human conversation.

MALTZ: . . . who nevertheless had a deep yearning to write



a play for Broadway. I happen to know of a peculiar problem he had, because I knew him and liked him very much, and the problem was this: he felt that he could not do work on a play when he was living in Hollywood. He had a large house in Connecticut, which I had seen, and which he kept going with a caretaker all year round. Every few years he would leave Hollywood for six months or three months on that Connecticut place, where he would not be able to write a play, and he would come back then to Hollywood because he had to keep the place up. And the poor fellow went on like this year after year. It must be borne in mind that, as I've mentioned earlier, most serious writers in the United States, and I think elsewhere in the world as well, are not able to earn a living from their serious work. Nobody sneered at Joseph Heller, the author of Catch-22, because he worked in an advertising agency. He was not said to have gone Madison Avenue. And people didn't sneer at Archibald MacLeish and Robert Penn Warren and Saul Bellow for teaching, but they were only doing the equivalent of what others did who sought work in radio or in films.

For me, until the blacklist came, Hollywood was a blessing. It was the way in which I could finance my serious writing while meeting my other obligations: one child, and then a second in 1942, and a wife with heavy medical and psychoanalytic bills, who was in bed ill for

half of each year from 1939 until 1950. If it had not been for Hollywood, I would have had to try and catch on in radio or in some work unrelated to writing. And on the whole I was also fortunate in the film work I got. Most of it was interesting. I worked at it as hard as I could, and I did well at it. My ability to save money earned in film writing also freed me to work at novels with no concern whatsoever for anything except my subject. Farthest from my mind was whether or not the novel might become a film. Now, this was not necessarily true of others, but it was true of me.

From the time that I began work in the middle of the year with Frank Tuttle, things went like this: the treatment for the story (a treatment is, let's say, the story itself told from beginning to end in anywhere from twenty to sixty pages) was accepted by the head of the studio and a producer was assigned to the project. In the forties the position of the producer was a very different one from the one it is today. The film producer was a counterpart to the play producer in New York, who was the dominant person in choosing a play and working with the writer on revisions, and then deciding who would direct it, and in casting the play with the director, and so on. In film, before a director was ever hired, it was the producer who was hired, and there were producers who had marvelous records in the quality of what they did: Pan Berman, for instance, a producer at MGM,

and Jerry Wald, a producer at Warner Brothers. The producer was the one who would work with the writer on the script, so that my first work with Tuttle was an unusual situation. Usually, in the setup at that time the producer would finish the script with the writer, the writer would then leave the studio, and the director would come in; and the writer and the director might have no contact whatsoever. And then it would be the producer with the director who would cast, and the producer would supervise the shooting, and the producer would have the last say on the cutting--as indeed the producer does today. But it was a sign of the fact that a project had become a reality, was going into screenplay, that a producer was assigned to it.

An amusing little thing happened on This Gun for Hire. The head of the studio at that time was a Broadway character by the name of Buddy DaSilva, who had been in the musical comedy field in New York. He knew the field of musical comedy, but I think little else. And he was afraid that I might not be able to write a sound screenplay so that, without waiting for my first screenplay, he hired a Warner Brothers writer who had done some fine scripts at Warner Brothers, W. R. Burnett, and Burnett did me a marvelous turn. As I would write sequences of the screenplay, they would be sent to Burnett for revision. He would look at

them and perhaps change a word and then send them back, untouched, and he did this for the whole screenplay. He got a joint screenplay credit for this because it was written into his contract that he had to get one. And at that time there wasn't the arbitration machinery in the Writers Guild which would have permitted me to protest this. But I was grateful to him because I didn't have the problem of wrangling with another man's taste. The usual practice of a second writer on a script like that is to try and change the script so that it will be his own.

The screenplay was completed at the end of September, and Alan Ladd, who had had a few small parts in films but had been noticed by Frank Tuttle, the director, was cast in it, and a passing sensation, Veronica Lake, was cast in the female part. The film went into production within about two weeks of the script having been finished, which was most unusual. I was assigned to be on the set because they had nothing else for me to do, actually, and I found this both useful in the learning process but essentially boring. And since I was not interested in becoming a director, I spent as much time as I could reading in the historical materials for my novel.

GARDNER: What problems did you confront in dealing with a screenplay? It's interesting to me that, having just gone from playwriting to novel writing, then you're

taking a novel and turning it back into screenwriting.

MALTZ: Well, actually, in the most fundamental way I had little problem with screenwriting, and the reason was precisely because I was a dramatist. Of all writers, I think. . . . Let me put it this way: most of those who have written plays, to my best knowledge, make a transition to film writing very easily. But one never knows whether, let's say, a novelist will be able to do a screenplay.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: There are excellent novelists who cannot do screenplays because they don't see . . . they don't write in terms of dramatic scenes. But since the film form, as a dramatic form, is very close to the play form, the transition for a dramatist is easy. It was easy for me to-- There was the same type of story construction, basic story construction in the play as in film, and, therefore, that fundamental requirement I had. Something that I did not have was the brevity of writing which is a requirement in the film form. I remember that I would turn in scenes of four pages to the director and to the producer, whose name was Richard Blumenthal, and those would emerge, after they cut them, as two-page scenes, one-and-a-half-page scenes. I would turn in two-page scenes that might become half-a-page scenes. And what

was happening was that they were moving the story from dramatic moment to dramatic moment with nothing extraneous, absolutely nothing extraneous. The rule was that, if you wanted to characterize, you had to characterize within the circumference of a dramatic event. You could not have some characterization for its own sake and then have the dramatic event. The characterization for its own sake had to go out, and this was a process that I had to learn, and, as a matter of fact, I would say that I still have not learned it fully.

For instance, a few years ago I did a script, which was never made, working with the director Mark Robson. Now, Mark Robson had begun as a cutter so he was expert in going to the core of a scene. And again and again Mark was able to cut down scenes that I gave him. I agreed with his cutting, but I couldn't have done it myself. However, the important fact right from the beginning with me was that I wrote scenes that they didn't throw out as scenes; they merely wanted to make them shorter. I was giving them the drama that they wanted and the step-by-step movement that they wanted. You have any other. . . ?

GARDNER: No, I think that's a good point. If there's another question, it would have to do with the specific problem of doing a screenplay from somebody else's novel as opposed to original work, which, of course, was what

you were used to doing.

MALTZ: Well, it is much easier, usually, to do something from, let's say, a novel--take a novel, then put it into a screenplay--than to write an original screenplay story, perhaps, because the story is there. There are many things you have to do to transmute it to the film form. They're not the same forms, but you have something that you can work with. It's the difference, let's say, between having a lump of clay which is just a ball of clay, or a head which has been sculpted by someone. Now, you must take that sculptured head and, while trying to keep the essence of it, let's say, you have to make it fit a somewhat different space; therefore you know that you have to push in the nose and make it smaller, and you have to make the ears a little larger, and you have to do this and that, but you're working with something that's already in a form. And so in general I consider it easier to do that work.

But there are problems that are special to film. For instance, when I was blacklisted I did a film (which will be nameless) based upon a novel that was about 700 pages long and that went over a period of years. If I had followed everything in the novel, I would have produced a screenplay that would make a film eighteen hours long. The question is, how do you get a film that will only be two hours long? Well, you have to study the novel and

get one scene that you invent which is not alien to the spirit of the book, but which stands for five chapters which you cannot reproduce because they would be too long, and yet which conveys the essence of the five chapters. So film writing is a very definite skill. To look down upon it is nonsense. And one of those who really appreciates it is the author . . . [tape recorder turned off] . . . Gore Vidal, who did some film writing before he became a novelist. Another one who appreciates it is James Michener. For the most part, I think a great many people are schizophrenic in their attitude toward Hollywood. They may have seen a given film that they thought was very beautiful, let's say, like Marty; on the other hand, they look down upon the Hollywood product because all too often they have said, well, let's go to the movies tonight--what's playing? And that's a ridiculous way to go to the movies. You're statistically likely to see some piece of garbage.

GARDNER: One last question and then I'll let you get on with your. . . .

MALTZ: No, I'm glad to have you ask them.

GARDNER: Since what you had been writing all along was material that had a great deal of your own philosophy in it . . .

MALTZ: Yes, yes.

GARDNER: . . . were you able to incorporate anything

into a screenplay of a philosophical subject?

MALTZ: As a matter of fact, you bring up a whole question which I think we might discuss, which is the question of getting in. . . . The charge was made in the Un-American Activities Committee about Communist writers trying to influence films, and so on. I don't know whether this is the moment to take it up; I think it might be better to take it up later. But in the case of Frank Tuttle and myself there was a harmony of attitude, and in order to make This Gun for Hire work when changed from the English scene to the American scene, and changed in the year-period, we found it necessary to make use, I believe, of a munitions maker who was a fascist in his general outlook. I don't remember the story very well. But we did that because we were seeking a motivation for what happened in the story, and we were not doing it because we wanted to try and say something politically. Actually, any writer, of whatever political or human persuasion, cannot help but write out of what is in his head and his heart. And a given characterization in a comedy by Neil Simon, for instance, obviously comes out of what is in him--in his thoughts, experiences, and emotions. And the same was true of me when I worked on given material.

For instance (not a bad illustration although so trivial), the leading character in This Gun for Hire

is a man who kills for money. And after the first murder you see him stop on a stairway, I think, where he pets a cat. Now, I happen to like cats very much, and if I didn't, probably the idea of him petting a cat would not even have occurred to me. But it did occur to me. And yet I wasn't trying to put that scene in in order to get people to like cats. So it's that difference.

GARDNER: Right.

MALTZ: Now, the success of the script for This Gun for Hire locked me into a contract that I didn't want but had no way of escaping. At that time when someone like myself sought film work, the producers always signed him to a seven-year contract. And if I had rejected that contract, I wouldn't have gotten that job which I so badly needed. Under the contract they had the right after the first three months, as I recall, to drop me; or they had the right to pick me up for another six months or another year. And then at the end of that period, if they wished, they could drop me; or if they picked me up, then my salary would go up by a given amount of dollars. If I stayed the whole seven years, my salary might then have ended up to be \$1,000 a week. Now, I didn't want to be on contract, and I certainly had no intention of working seven years if they picked me up, but there was no way I could avoid the contract. So that they did pick me up, and in the

the middle of November when the shooting on This Gun for Hire was completed, or almost so, I was assigned to work for Cecil B. De Mille on a Mexican theme called Rurales. The rurales were mounted police in the countryside of prerevolutionary Mexico noted both for their efficiency and their brutality. Can we pause for a moment?

GARDNER: Sure. [tape recorder turned off]

MALTZ: For the first month of my working with De Mille, it was fine because I was reading Mexican history, which is fascinating, and getting ideas. And then came the problem of the once-a-week meetings with De Mille. De Mille at that time came into the studio just on Fridays, as I recall, and he had a separate table in the commissary. He always came in wearing a pair of riding boots. He was a man of about five-feet-seven or -eight, brawny and strong, bald-headed and very macho in his conduct. And when he came in for lunch, those of us who were in his retinue ate lunch with him. He had one woman who had written for him in his early years and whom he kept on payroll although she didn't contribute anything that I knew of, and some other person. He had myself on as a writer and he had some junior writer, a young man called St. John on. And after the lunch we would have a meeting, and I discovered that De Mille, in my view of him, was a man who had

x number of pigeonholes in his head, and when you suggested an idea, as I suggested quite a few, if it fit into a pigeonhole, then he said fine; and no matter how good the other ideas were, if they didn't fit any of those pigeonholes, they were no good. I did hit one pigeonhole right off, and I thought, "this is going to be great," because he was very pleased about it, and I don't think I hit another pigeonhole for the time I was with him. [laughter] And so the work, as the weeks went on with him, started to get less attractive.

I'll tell what happened to that in a moment, but now I want to pause to say that early, during the seven months of 1941, I became attached to a party branch in the film section, and in the course of the next six and a half years, I was in several branches of the party. Many of the members were writers, but there were also readers and some secretaries and so on. Meetings were weekly. There were serious discussions of the Communist party programs and issues of the day. Special topics were discussed after certain people had given reports and pamphlets had been read [on] such [issues] as, say, the woman question and the matter of equal rights of women, and of foreign policy. Literature was sold and sometimes a book review was given by someone who had been assigned to do it, or volunteered to do it, and selections of classics,

Marxist classics, were discussed. Members might be urged to join in an election campaign, and discussion of recruiting more members would go on. We would meet at different homes. I attended branch meetings quite regularly, but I was not involved in inner-party work at any time. What I mean by that is that any organization needs wheels within wheels to make it operate, and so we had members who were elected to be branch organizers and who would be responsible to section organizers--to get literature, to deliver dues, and so on. And I didn't do that kind of thing. I was never a branch organizer and I didn't want any of that kind of work. I did from time to time function somewhat in the Hollywood branch of the League of American Writers. And another thing that I did do was to read the work in progress of other party members who had a novel, a short story, a screenplay that they sought help on. In that period I avoided organizational work as much as possible, after my experience in New York, so that in free hours I could do some of the very extensive research that was needed for this historical work I was planning. And I was now able to buy some of the basic books in the field and so avoid the time that used to be involved in my going to the public library for research.

I came in contact in the course of my first six months in Hollywood with what I would call the benign and

the malign role of John Howard Lawson in dealing with the material of other writers. I am not going to discuss him as a functionary of the Hollywood Communist party, of course; although I had certain strong impressions about it, they were not at firsthand. But I will discuss what happened with him and other writers. I had known Jack Lawson in New York in connection with work in the Dramatists Guild and Authors League when he was living there for a year and a half, or two, in the thirties. I had heard about his very leading role in the creation of the Screen Writers Guild, of which he was the first president. And there seems no doubt that he earned almost universal respect from other writers for his work and his achievements and his leadership. By the time I came out here I found that he was held by most of the members of the Communist party out here in a respect that amounted almost to awe and subservience, none of which I felt for him. But there was already an attitude that if a writer who was in the party was embarking on a project, he or she would serve themselves very well if they asked Jack to talk over the project with them, that he was always willing to be helpful (and he was), and that great good would come from this. Or, if somebody had written something, they asked Jack to read it and Jack would read it.

Now, I have no doubt that he was helpful to certain writers and certain projects, just as I know I was, or

feel that others would be. But it's one thing to be asked to read someone's work and make what helpful suggestions or criticisms one can; it's another thing for all of the people in an organization to begin to feel that they really should not publish anything or submit anything unless Jack had approved. That becomes censorship. And indeed it worked itself into a most terrible kind of censorship because I know of instances where writers gave up books that they were going to write because Jack said, "Well, I don't think that's the sort of thing you ought to be writing now." I know of this.

GARDNER: Can you cite any examples, or do you care to?

MALTZ: Yes, I do. I know that Guy Endore gave up one book. Now, Guy Endore was a writer in his own right, and I know that he gave up a book that Jack said, "I don't think you ought to be writing it now." I don't remember other names, although I have talked about them, and I know that they exist. But this was a widespread thing, and it was a malign thing, and it came out of a fact that Jack just got a bigger and bigger ego, all of which was hidden by an outward show of modesty. But it was expected that you would show your work to Jack. And I thought this was wrong, and I never made an issue of it because, as I look back upon it, it never occurred to me to make an issue of it and perhaps I should have.

And yet I want to qualify that by saying that at the memorial meeting for Lawson, which was held within the past year, there was an outpouring of respect and love for him which absolutely astonished me. I remember that Abby Mann, who had come on the scene much later, felt that Jack Lawson's book, and a meeting he had with Lawson, had been inspiring. I remember a wire from Ring Lardner [Jr.], who was not present, was so laudatory that I was astonished. And [there were wires] from other people as well. And yet that doesn't cause me to temper my feeling that the role he played was malign as well as benign.

I think I might mention that my social and recreational life was very limited in Hollywood, and it was just about as it had been in New York: that is to say, there were certain circles of friends that we saw on a Saturday night or so, and that was it. We were as far from the Hollywood social life that is written about in movie magazines as we were when we had lived in New York. We had one friend with a swimming pool and we were glad to be invited; but when we swam, it generally was at the beach in the summer. I spent as much time as I could, and that was considerable, with my young son, since my time could be flexible. And by the end of the first year, I did get to be a part of a Sunday softball game and kept that up all the years

in Hollywood because I was always crazy about baseball. And I would see occasional movies, what you'd call the important ones, but I was not a movie buff, and all time that I could spare for it went to research.

GARDNER: In 1942, also, you had a credit for a film called Moscow Strikes Back in which you wrote English commentary.

MALTZ: I'm going to come to that. I'm still in '41.

GARDNER: Oh, all right.

MALTZ: When I come to '42 I'll speak of that, and I'll speak of what happened with This Gun for Hire when it opened and so on.

GARDNER: Okay.

MALTZ: That's why going by years is for me an easier way of organizing.

GARDNER: Well, my note has Moscow Strikes Back after This Gun for Hire, that's why I wanted to make sure it got included.

MALTZ: Yes, it will be.

From the time of Pearl Harbor, December 5, 1941, on, there wasn't, of course, one day in which I, like millions of others, didn't follow every event of the war with riveting concern. And the events of the war were the constant subject of conversation. It led to certain activities that I barely remember, such as

participation in meetings of the [Hollywood] Writers Mobilization and those of the League of American Writers to help the war effort, and there was a writers board, war board or some such name, established by the Authors League in the East. I remember I wrote a short, little playlet for children having to do with the war to explain things, and later on I'll refer to other things I did do. Pearl Harbor was a Sunday, or the news came on a Sunday, and the very next day, when I went into the Paramount studio where I was working, there was big, heavy drama, I suppose in Hollywood style: the studio gates were locked, and a pass was required, and no one was admitted until his name was phoned up to an office, and there were police there with their weapons and so on.

During the next period there was the terrible shame of the relocation of the Japanese citizens here and the cruel manner in which it was done so that they were robbed of lifelong work, possessions. I was one of those who bought the spy danger based upon what allegedly had happened at Pearl Harbor. I can remember reading about alleged Japanese spies on Pearl Harbor who had been living there for years and were planted there by the Japanese secret service and who had lights on to show Japanese planes where to bomb and so on. And I accepted what happened. I do know that individuals, like Carey

McWilliams, did not accept it and protested it, and I wish I had been among them--but I wasn't. And that's how it happened.

Now, at that time I was thirty-three and, with a sickly wife and a four-year-old child, I didn't consider enlisting. But I was 1-A, and there was no telling if I would be drafted so I intensified my research work. And, in a certain sense, the war gave me the opportunity to take time off from organizational work, because in all of the previous years on so many things, I, as a member of the Communist party, had been urging certain public policies that we hoped would take place; but now we were in accord with the main public policy, and we didn't have to urge Roosevelt to wage the war, as it were, as we once had tried to urge him to allow Loyalist Spain to buy arms.

Early in 1942, I went to the story editor of Paramount, a very nice man by the name of Bill Dozier, and told him that I simply couldn't continue with De Mille. And the reason for it was not alone the difficulty I had in working with him, but the treatment that he gave to the young writer I've mentioned, a man called St. John (I forget his first name). There was one Friday when he said something so cruel to St. John, something like, "You haven't said anything this afternoon--is there anything in that

head of yours?" And he said this in a voice that was cutting and sadistic. And I just told Dozier that I just couldn't work with a man who would do that. And Dozier was sympathetic. He tried briefly to persuade me to continue, but I said I couldn't and he said all right.

I was still on contract to the studio, and for several weeks they tried me on a number of different pieces of work that they had. There was a lousy Dashiell Hammett book that I couldn't see into a screenplay.

GARDNER: Which one?

MALTZ: I don't remember the name of it anymore. And when I say a lousy book--maybe it's a good Hammett book . . .

GARDNER: . . . but it just wasn't . . .

MALTZ: . . . it wasn't, I thought, something for a screenplay. And then some other thing. And then for four months I was put on the only absolute piece of tripe I ever had in film work, and this was something called The Man on Half-Moon Street. I was on it with a director, an English director, and, I think, another writer, and it was, to use a current word, a piece of cockamamie in which a man of about 110 years old kept himself looking youthful by drinking radium, I believe. And he had a desire to marry a young girl, but there

was a big problem: because he drank radium, he lit up at night. [laughter] And so here was this nonsensical piece of work, this garbage that we were supposed to make into a story, and the only way we survived work on it, I know, was talking about all sorts of things while doing it. But finally, apparently, we worked out a treatment. I have no memory of it, but I know that I have an official credit for, I think, story treatment on it. It was ultimately made and I never saw it. That was an unfortunate experience.

In May 1942 This Gun for Hire came out, and Alan Ladd became an overnight star. The film was very successful and got a lot of attention, and I have been interested in these past years to see it and find that it was a very creaky melodrama--in my opinion, pretty second-rate. It doesn't stand up at all, and I just don't know why it was successful in the way it was.

GARDNER: What about compared to some of the other films like that of that period? Do you think it holds up any worse than they do?

MALTZ: Yes, worse. For instance, I believe that a film like, I don't know. . . . I only saw small portions of--What is that Hammett thing that Bogart was in?

GARDNER: Oh, The Maltese Falcon.

MALTZ: Yes, The Maltese Falcon, I believe, would stand

up infinitely better, and I know that a number of my own films of that period stand up well. But that one doesn't. And I was shocked, when I first saw it perhaps six or seven years ago, at what a contrived-- It's a very contrived melodrama, but it made me remember the work with Tuttle. I recall times with him in which I would say, "Well, you can't do a thing like that, it's ridiculous." And he'd say, "We'll find an answer, we'll find an answer; there's nothing you can't lick." Well, we did find answers but they were very contrived.

In June 1942 my agent arranged with Paramount for me to get a six-month leave on my contract. The problem with Paramount having me on contract was that they did a great many light comedies and musicals, neither of which I was able to work on. They didn't have the kind of material that would have fitted me better, which Warner Brothers had. And so they wanted to keep me on contract, but they arranged the six-month leave of absence. And I had now been working steadily for twelve months on films, and during this period I had paid off my debts and bought the car necessary to life in Los Angeles and bought some clothes for the L.A. weather and saved up enough to start work on the novel. But then I found that because of gas rationing, which had come in during the war, I could no longer go to the South in an auto for the research I needed. I needed to go to various battlefields. I needed to go to a good many places. . . .

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